

GAME MANUAL

Gary Grigsby's

WAR IN THE WEST

OPERATION TORCH



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1. INTRODUCTION – IMPORTANT CHANGES IN GARY GRIGSBY'S WAR IN THE WEST

Gary Grigsby's War in the West: Operation Torch includes eleven new scenarios for use with the Gary Grigsby's War in the West game. These scenarios were designed by Trey Marshall, John Young, and Randy Seger, and this manual includes their historical and player notes for the scenarios.

There have been many changes made to the standard game to go along with this expansion, including several changes to the air portion of the game. **Many of the air changes are detailed in the two new One Page Guides that can be accessed via the Game Menu.** Additional victory condition changes for Air Campaign scenarios are detailed in section 4.0 of this manual. Also it is strongly suggested you read the latest What's New file that can be accessed via your Start menu group for War in the West.

There are two new features unique to the Torch expansion that affect both the new Torch expansion scenarios and those that are part of the standard War in the West game. First, the air group unit detail screen now contains insignia artwork for most air units in the game. **Second, the multiplayer server game has been expanded to allow for, 3 and 4 player games, as well as 2 player cooperative games against the AI.** Each side may have an air commander that takes all actions during the Air Planning Phase, and a ground commander that takes all actions during the Action Phase (ground movement and combat). All players must own Torch in order to participate in a cooperative vs AI, 3, or 4 player game. **Additional instructions regarding the enhanced Multiplayer functionality can be found in section 7.0.**

1.1. SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Please ensure your system meets the minimum requirements listed below.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

OS: Windows XP SP3, Vista, 7, 8, 10

CPU: 1.5GHz+

RAM: 2GB

Video/Graphics: 128MB DirectX 9.0c+ Compatible

Sound: 16 bit DirectX 9+ Compatible

Hard disk space: 2 GB Free

DVD-Rom: Yes, for physical version only

DirectX version: 9.0c or higher

Peripheral hardware: Mouse, Keyboard

Internet Connection for Multiplayer++

1.2. INSTALLING THE GAME

Operation Torch is an expansion which requires *Gary Grigsby's War in the West* in order to install and play correctly.

To install the game, insert the game DVD disc into your DVD drive. If you have disabled the Autorun function on your DVD or if you are installing from a digital download, navigate to the DVD or download file location, double-click on the installation file, and if it is a zip archive, then double click on the executable (exe) file that is shown inside the archive. The correct file name will normally include the words "SetupRelease". Follow all on-screen prompts to complete the installation.

1.3. UNINSTALLING THE GAME

Please use the Add/Remove Programs or Programs and Features option from the Windows Control Panel or the "Uninstall" link in the game's Windows START menu to uninstall the game. Uninstalling through any other method will not properly uninstall the game.

1.4. PRODUCT UPDATES, BONUS CONTENT AND REGISTERING YOUR GAME

In order to maintain our product excellence, Matrix Games releases updates containing new features, enhancements, and corrections to any known issues. All our updates are available free on our website and can also be downloaded quickly and easily by clicking on the "Check for Updates" link in your Game Menu or by using the "Update Game" shortcut in your Windows START menu folder for the game.

We also periodically make beta (preview) updates and other content available to registered owners. Keeping up with these special updates is made easy and is free by signing up for a Matrix Games Member account. When you are signed up, you can then register your Matrix Games products in order to receive access to these bonus game-related materials. Follow this process:

1. Sign Up for a Matrix Games Member account: THIS IS A ONE TIME PROCEDURE; once you have signed up for a Matrix account, you are in the system and will not need to sign up again. Go to www.matrixgames.com and click the Members hyperlink at the top. In the new window, select Register NOW and follow the onscreen instructions. When you're finished, click the Please Create My New Account button, and a confirmation e-mail will be sent to your specified e-mail account.
2. Register a New Game Purchase – Once you have signed up for a Matrix Games Member account, you can then register any Matrix Games title you own in your new account. To do so, log in to your account on the Matrix Games website (www.matrixgames.com). Click "Register Your Game" near the top of the menu in the Members Club to register your new Matrix Games purchase.

We strongly recommend registering your game as it will give you a backup location for your serial number should you lose it in the future. Once you've registered your game, when you log in to the Members section you can view your list of registered titles by clicking My Games. Each game title is a hyperlink that will take you to an information page on the game (including all the latest news on that title).

Also on this list is a Downloads for Registered Games hyperlink that takes you to a page that has all the latest public and registered downloads, including patches, for your registered titles. You can also access patches and updates via our "Latest Downloads" section (<http://www.matrixgames.com/products/latestdownloads.asp>).

1.5. RE-DOWNLOADING YOUR GAME

If you were logged into your Members Club account when you purchased your game, it will be automatically registered and you can access an automatic re-download link by going to <http://www.matrixgames.com/>

members/myorders.asp or using the “My Orders” link in the Members Club. If your download does not show up there, you can contact our Help Desk at <http://www.matrixgames.com/support/> to receive a new download link. This process generally takes one business day, but is often faster during normal work hours.

1.6. GAME FORUMS

Our forums are one of the best things about Matrix Games. Every game has its own forum with our designers, developers and the gamers playing the game. If you are experiencing a problem, have a question or just an idea on how to make the game better, post a message there. Go to <http://www.matrixgames.com> and click on the Forums hyperlink.

1.7. TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Should you have a technical problem with the game, the best way to get help is to post a note in the Technical Support sub-forum of the main game forum at <http://www.matrixgames.com/forums>. You'll then hear back from either our Matrix Games Staff, the development team, or from one of the many helpful players of the game. This is usually the fastest way to get help. Alternatively, you can contact our Help Desk at <http://www.matrixgames.com/support/>. Support requests will generally be answered within 24 hours, except on weekends or national holidays.

1.8. MULTIPLAYER SETUP

Starting and joining multiplayer games is a straightforward process.

First, each player needs an active Slitherine.com account. If you do not have one, go to Slitherine.com and register for your account by clicking “Login” in the upper right-hand corner and then select “Sign up here.”

Once you have your credentials in hand, start the game and click “Multiplayer” from the opening screen. At the prompt, enter your Slitherine login and password, as above; this will then take you to the Multiplayer Lobby. If your version is out of date, a warning will appear to encourage you to upgrade to the latest version for the best multiplayer compatibility.

Once in the lobby, in the left-hand column, you will see your ongoing games. In the top right you will see your open challenges and in the bottom right you will see challenges from other players which you may accept.

A challenge is an invitation to play a particular scenario and side. To issue a challenge, use the “new” button in the top right section. To accept another player’s challenge, use the View/Accept button in the bottom right section.

When viewing your list of ongoing multiplayer games, the name of the current player will be highlighted in green and it will tell you what turn it is and the current victory points. You can click on a challenge and then use the “Play” button in the bottom left to play your turn. Once your turn is complete, the save file will automatically upload to the server so that your opponent(s) can play.

Please note that playing an opponent using a different version of the game will most likely cause data corruption issues, including possible crashes. It’s worth making sure that you are on the same version.

You can also filter for completed games and resigned games using the check boxes on the bottom.

2. SCENARIOS IN NORTH AFRICA

NOTE

For the North African scenarios, the demands on the Allied player make play especially difficult for the Allied AI. We suggest that you give the Allied AI a little more help (in terms of difficulty level settings) than you would give the German AI. It is generally true that an attacking AI has a harder time than a defending AI. With the additional logistical difficulties in North Africa along with the scarcity of units and poor terrain in Tunisia, Allied play is especially challenging for the AI. We also recommend players refrain from using Movement Fog of War in these scenarios. This will make it harder for units to “hide” in the desert, and simulates the use of small desert reconnaissance patrols.

2.1. SCENARIO 1: ROMMEL ATTACKS 43 (14 FEBRUARY 1943 – 20 MARCH 1943)

Designer: Trey Marshall

Scenario Size: Very Small

Turns: 5



2.1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

With the British 8th Army overextended in southern Tunisia, the Axis command wanted to land a blow on the American forces building strength near Gafsa and Tessa. If left unchecked, the Americans could break through the Tunisian plain and cut the Axis defenders in half. The attack was carried out by General von Arnim's 5th Panzer Army in the north and Field Marshall Rommel's Panzer Armee Afrika in the south. There were vehement disagreements between Rommel and von Arnim on the operational goals of the offensive. Rommel favored the destruction of the American forces and a drive on the Algerian coast in order to outflank the Allies' position in Tunisia. Von Arnim, on the other hand, wanted a much smaller drive to claim some better defensive terrain to the west and dig in.

The offensive met with excellent success in the beginning, but the disagreements between von Arnim and Rommel spoiled some opportunities to follow up the early successes. Field Marshal Kesselring finally placed Rommel in charge of the newly created Army Group Afrika

which left Rommel firmly in control over all operations in Tunisia. After breaking through the Kasserine Pass and nearly breaking through the British defenses at Thala, Rommel was forced to call off the attack. The Axis supply situation was rapidly deteriorating and the British 8th Army was preparing to launch its assault on the Mareth defenses. The result of the campaign was that poor doctrine and inexperience on the part of the Americans was brought to light and forced leadership changes with General George Patton receiving command of II Corps.

See section 6.0 - North African Campaign History.

2.1.2. PLAY TIPS

An Allied victory here is almost impossible, as the Americans have poor experience and are spread all over the map. Veteran German panzer forces are mobile and can pack a punch. The Allies will be hard pressed to prevent the Axis from punching through, although reinforcements will continue to arrive. As the Axis, attaining a major victory will be a challenge



as you will have to capture Tbessa and/or Thala which is deep in the Allied rear. Speed and penetration should be your focus as you should be trying to capture those final objectives at all costs. Do not attempt to surround Allied forces and make them surrender as this will cost you time. Better to rout the Allied forces and push ever deeper.

2.1.3. DESIGNER'S NOTES

This scenario actually gives the player a bit more time than was actually used and explores the 'what if' scenario had Rommel continued the attack. By 23 February, Rommel had already given up the attack and began to withdraw against Kesselring's advice. Some of the Allied units have been positioned in such a way so that they have already maneuvered to attempt to blunt Rommel's advance.

2.2. SCENARIO 2: BATTLE FOR TUNISIA 43 (14 FEBRUARY 1943 – 26 JUNE 1943)

Designer: Trey Marshall

Scenario Size: Medium

Turns: 19 – Possible Allied Triggered Early End

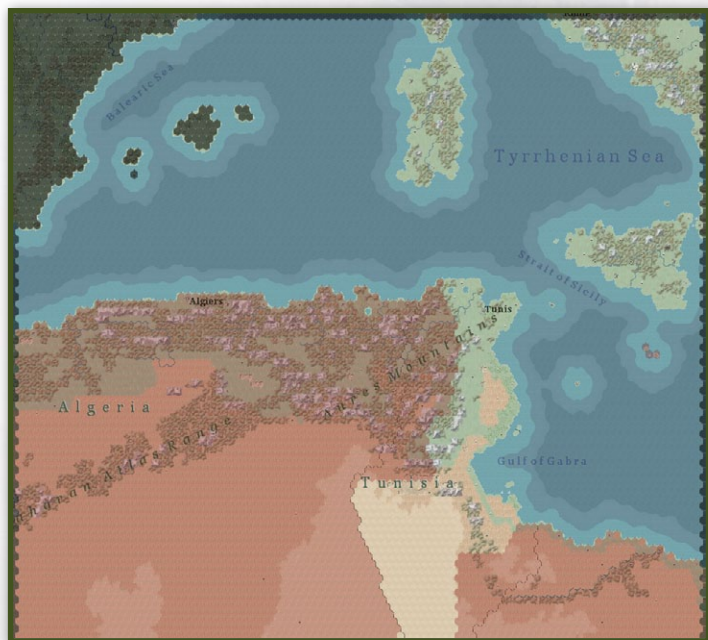
2.2.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This scenario begins with Rommel and von Arnim's joint attack against the Americans at Gafsa and Sidi Bou Zid and would lead to the battle of Kasserine Pass. The Axis are pretty well entrenched throughout Tunisia. After several months of attempting to push through the most direct route to Tunis in the north, the Allies are now ready to try alternatives to the frontal assault. American forces are gathering strength in central Tunisia with the possibility of the break through into the Tunisia central plains. Montgomery's 8th Army is planning to break the formidable defenses at Mareth and unhinge the Axis defenses in the south.

See section 6.0 - North African Campaign History.

2.2.2. PLAY TIPS

For the Allied player, you have overwhelming air power so use that to your advantage. The Axis has significant defensive positions and powerful veteran German units but they are still vulnerable. The Italians are much



easier to drive out of positions than their German counterparts and the Axis logistical situation in Tunisia is perilous so continue to hammer ports, airfields and railyards while running naval patrols off the coast.

For the German player, you only have two advantages. Your first is your veteran panzer divisions, and you should keep these forces concentrated as a counterattack punch to keep the Allies off balance. The Americans are particularly inexperienced and the Free French are poorly equipped. You need to plan your defense in the south quickly as the Mareth Line can easily be outflanked through the Tebaga Gap (between the Jebel Tebaga and the Matmata Hills) where there are no fortifications. A better defensive position would be the Gabes Gap but there are no fortifications there and you will need time to build them up. Regardless, once the Allies break through into the southern Tunisian plains near Graiba, there is no decent defensible terrain.



2.2.3. DESIGNER'S NOTES

This is probably the last chance that the Axis forces have to launch any kind of offensive. The Axis supply situation is hopeless and its airpower is greatly diminished. The command issues plaguing the Axis with Rommel's and von Arnim's disputes are non-existent in the scenario. The Army Group Afrika HQ unit becomes available quickly so make sure you have enough AP points to place Rommel in charge if that is what you desire.

2.3. SCENARIO 3: TORCH TO TUNISIA 42-43 (10 NOVEMBER 1942 – 26 JULY 1943)

Designer: Trey Marshall

Scenario Size: Large

Turns: 37 – Possible Allied Triggered Early End

2.3.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Allies advance on two fronts in an effort to remove the Axis threat in Africa. The joint American and British units that landed in Morocco and



Algeria during Operation Torch are now advancing on Tunisia. Rommel's Panzer Armee Afrika is fleeing from Egypt with Montgomery's 8th Army in hot pursuit.

See section 6.0 - North African Campaign History.

2.3.2. PLAY TIPS

This campaign is sweeping in scope because there are hundreds of miles of terrain of all types with very few units. In order to be successful, you will have to be bold and aggressive as this is a campaign of maneuver. You will need to be proficient in using all of your assets to include logistics, air power and reconnaissance. Neither side has unlimited sea and air transportation. You need to use your fighters to protect your shipping lanes and ports as well as using your naval patrols and bombers to intercept enemy ships. Ignoring this could be disastrous. Make sure you have aerial reconnaissance running on all possible avenues of approach. Get in the habit of monitoring your depots, their damage and their priorities.

For the Axis player, your first order of business is to determine where Rommel's Panzer Armee Afrika should reconstitute and attempt to hold off Montgomery. Should the reinforcements sent to Africa be sent to

defend Tunisia or shore up Rommel? By holding up Montgomery in Libya, the Axis can soak up a lot of VPs but it spreads out the Axis defense. The Axis ports in Libya all start damaged as well, because Allied air and sea power was devastating Axis shipping in the Mediterranean. There is also an opportunity to strike quickly in Tunisia against the inexperienced 1st British Army with veteran German forces.

For the Allied player, you should be focusing on out-maneuvering the Axis forces in order to give you an advantageous area from which to launch the final blow. The Axis have excellent defensive terrain in which to choose to make a stand. Your airbases in Algeria and Tunisia are small and unimproved and the Axis will have the advantage in the beginning with better airfields that are closer to the front. You will need to start building supply depots and improving airfields constantly. Focus your attacks on the easier Italians. The main Axis Achilles heel is its logistics so begin hammering its ports and running naval patrols off the coast. The results will probably be frustrating at first, but will pay off in the long run.

2.3.3. DESIGNER'S NOTES

This campaign has been one of the most enjoyable that I have worked on with numerous operational strategies available for both sides. There is a lot of room for maneuver combined with bold and aggressive actions. After the defeat at El Alamein, Rommel really did lose much of his interest in continuing the war in Africa as he had numerous opportunities to stand and fight Montgomery and chose to withdraw instead. The defenses at El Agheila and Tarhunah Mountains are two such examples. There was incredible pressure on Rommel to defend Libya from both Kesselring and the Commando Supremo but Rommel did what he wanted. Any other German commander probably would have been relieved. Having the option for the Axis to defend Libya was an option I was interested in allowing the players to explore.

Logistics will probably be a source of frustration for both players, as the port capacities of the North African cities were woefully inadequate to handle the needs of warring armies in the desert. On top of that, once damaged, their capacity dwindles even further making their defense a top priority for both players. On top of that, the Axis have a paltry 150 cargo ships available for all shipping while the Allies have a respectable 450. Neglecting naval patrols and air superiority around ports could be very

hazardous. The limitations of the availability of supplies will be a limiting factor in the Allies advance, so very close consideration should be given to the creation of depots and priorities of supply. The Americans in particular experienced a massive learning curve in logistics and port operations that limited their early involvement in Tunisia. These units could only be drip fed into Tunisia due to the overall lack of transportation and difficulties in supplying the few units already engaged in combat.

The Allies in Tunisia will be at another disadvantage in that its airpower starts the campaign hamstrung and unable to bring its overwhelming power to bear on the Axis forces. The Allies in Morocco and Algeria start with small unimproved airfields that are subject to high operational losses and poor weather. The Axis forces have nice improved airfields at Bizerte and Tunis and are much more responsive. The Allies will have to be patient and start improving the airfields that it does have so more and more airgroups can be moved closer to the front.

Production has been customized for both forces as much as the system allows instead of using a blanket percentage modifier which does not accurately reflect the true conditions on the ground. Most of the US factories begin the game at size 1 while many of the British factories are significantly reduced. This is to replicate the difficulties in getting replacement equipment to North Africa early in the campaign but as the game progresses, the build limits will ensure that more and more equipment will get produced. Axis equipment replacements are as historical as could be made possible within the system. Some equipment has been zeroed out since it did not see service in North Africa. The Panther tank is a good example of this.

One aspect of the North African scenarios that I am very proud of is that almost all units in the game have their own custom OB. The 10th, 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions all have different tables of organization and equipment based on their unique organizations. The Combat Commands of the 1st US Armored Division is customized based on their task organization during the campaign. Some of the units even change names as the campaign progresses for further realism. The 5th Fallschirmjäger Regiment becomes the 2nd Herman Goering Jaeger Brigade in early 1943. The order of battle for these scenarios is the most comprehensive and accurate than any other wargame on the market. Brad Hunter was an immense resource in gathering much of this information.

3. SCENARIOS IN ITALY AND SOUTHERN FRANCE

3.1. SCENARIO 4: OPERATION DIADEM TO THE GOTHIC LINE 44 (11 MAY 1944 – 27 SEPTEMBER 1944)

Designer: Trey Marshall

Scenario Size: Medium

Turns: 20



3.1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Allies launch Operation Diadem in May 1944 to breach the Gustav Line south of Rome and draw German strategic reserves away from France.



The massive Allied assault drew a majority of the German units away from around Anzio. Once the pressure has been alleviated around Anzio, the US VI Corps launched its own attack towards Rome. In order to avoid being surrounded, the German 10th and 14th Armies withdrew into the Gothic Line where it again frustrated Allied efforts at making any additional progress.

3.1.2. PLAY TIPS

Allied players need to focus their overwhelming airpower to use in interdictions and help support ground attacks. Any successful breaches need to be reinforced in order to encourage the Germans to abandon their current positions. Once a breach in the Gustav Line is obtained, the Allied player should strive to penetrate as much as possible towards the Gothic Line. If you allow the Germans to withdraw unhindered, the Gothic Line will be almost impossible to breach and thus a major victory will not be possible. The Axis player simply has to delay the Allies for as long as possible by using the rugged terrain to his advantage and soak up as many VPs as possible. Even if the Allies encircle a group of your units, the time it will take the Allies to reduce the pocket will be valuable time not spent trying to attack the Gothic Line.

3.1.3. DESIGNER'S NOTES

This is a tough one for the Allies to win a decisive victory. The Germans in Italy consist of some of the best troops in Europe and are defending in rugged terrain. It doesn't help that Operation Dragoon will siphon off a significant portion of your force.

3.2. SCENARIO 5: OP DRAGOON (8 AUGUST 1944 – 18 SEPTEMBER 1944)

Designers: John Young and Randy Seger

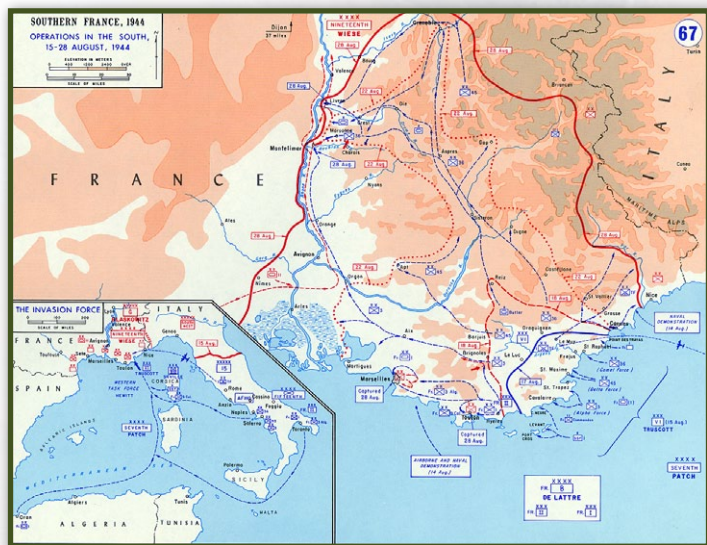
Scenario Size: Small

Turns: 6



3.2.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Op Dragoon, originally named Anvil, was the invasion of Southern France. The original scale of the invasion was reduced in order to provide more landing craft for Overlord. Whilst considered by the British as a diversion effort it produced spectacular results.



3.2.2. PLAY TIPS

The Allied Player has full freedom to retarget the invasion on Turn 1 - but you will find that due to terrain the options are limited.

3.2.3. DESIGNER'S NOTES

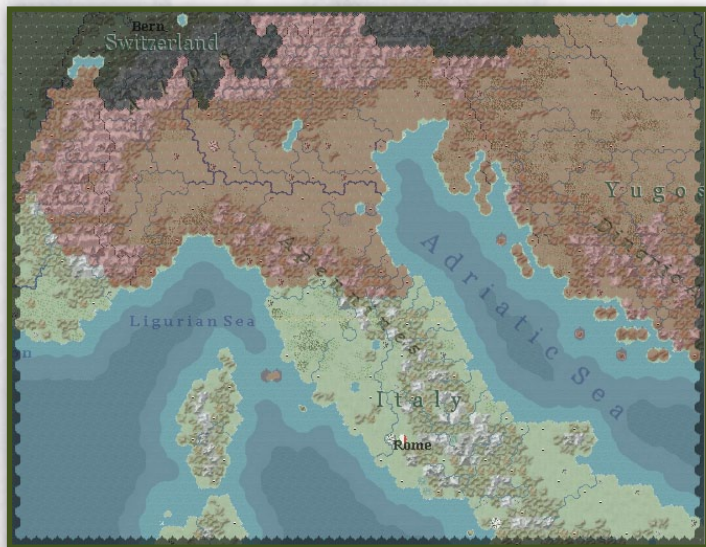
When you play this scenario you will find it difficult to emulate the success made in history. This is because the Axis has the ability to stay and fight. In reality they melted away, partly to provide reinforcements to Normandy, and then following the Cobra breakout they retreated swiftly to avoid being cut off in France. This can make this scenario frustrating but to not have included the scenario would have prompted the question 'why no Dragoon scenario?' The VP levels have been adjusted so that in relative terms any German losses are very costly. This encourages the Axis player to conduct a delaying rather than a defensive battle.

3.3. SCENARIO 6: BREACHING THE GOTHIC LINE (25 AUGUST 1944 – 4 MAY 1945)

Designers: John Young and Randy Seger

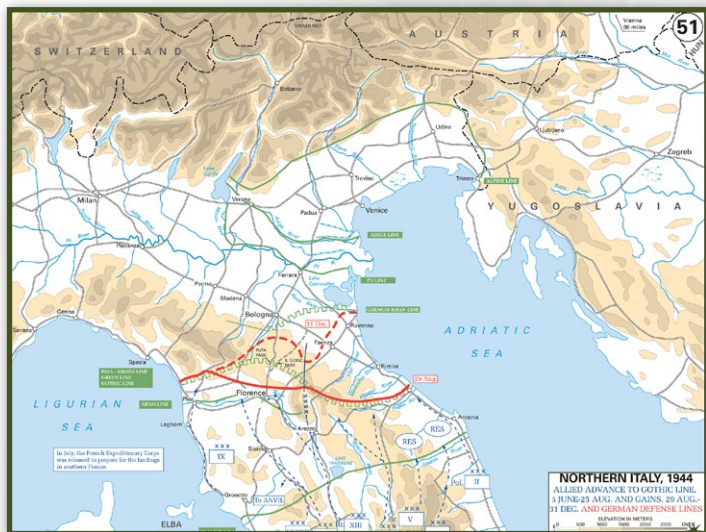
Scenario Size: Medium

Turns: 36 – Possible Allied Triggered Early End



3.3.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After the Anzio landings unlocked the stalemate of the Gustav Line the Axis forces retreated in an orderly series of delaying battles to their next defensive line. The Gothic Line was a series of fortifications built where the Apennine Mountains cross Italy just north of Florence. The pursuing Allied forces found themselves with the challenge of a new defensive line, having not only lost troops to Operation Dragoon, but also finding infantry replacements hard to come by. Italy was becoming a side show theatre of operations. Historically the 8th BR Army attacked first along the eastern coastal plain but failed to create enough space to allow the armour



to breakout onto the northern plains before the autumn rains and then winter set in. The 5th US Army tried to force the passes between Florence and Bologna and despite heroic efforts failed too. The major breakthrough did not occur until Spring 45 by which time Italy had become a sideshow despite the heroism shown by those fighting.

3.3.2. PLAY TIPS

The Allies have a brief window of opportunity to breach the Gothic Line before the autumn rains and the winter sets in. For the Axis, holding on for the first few turns is key if the Allies are not to break through to Bologna and the Po Valley. The Allies have overwhelming air superiority, but the ability to use air interdiction is limited by the terrain.

3.3.3. DESIGNER'S NOTES

The scenario also includes the Maritime Alps Front on the France - Italy Border. The Allied Forces are mainly frozen for the starting few turns, but will activate if the Axis player attempts an advance into France. Conversely it would be unwise to strip troops from this area too. The Axis troops in

Istria are also frozen for the initial turns as there was concern that the Allies would conduct another Anzio type landing. The Axis have very limited APs so use them sparingly.

3.3.4. RECOMMENDED READING

Orgill, Douglas "The Gothic Line" Pan 1969

4. THE AIR CAMPAIGN SCENARIOS (POINTBLANK & WEAKEST LINK)

SPECIAL VICTORY CONDITIONS IN AIR BATTLE SCENARIOS

In each air battle scenario players will find additional information regarding victory conditions on the victory screen. The Allied player's bombing victory points are modified based on the number listed for each target type on the right side of the screen. These values can range between 0 and 200, and a factory type given a 0 value will not be listed on the Victory screen as it is not considered a valid target for the scenario. The value listed is divided by 100 to determine the impact on scoring, so a value of 50 will score $\frac{1}{2}$ the normal bombing points, while a value of 200 will score double the normal points. Negative points are also awarded, one point for every 10 Allied aircraft lost and one additional point for every 10 engines on the destroyed aircraft. Multipliers can be set for each type of aircraft and for the engine bonus of from 1 to 10. Example: If Level Bomber type modifier = 2 and Engine modifier = 1 then every 10 B-24s destroyed will cost the Allies 6 victory points $((10 \text{ a/c} \times 2 \text{ Level bomber modifier})/10 + (40 \text{ engines} \times 1 \text{ engine modifier})/10)$.

OVERVIEW

The two air campaign scenarios have been written to allow the player to focus their efforts on the control of the air groups. As War in the West is mainly about Air Land Integration, the ability to create a pure air campaign is limited. To address this, the timings of the air campaigns have been

selected to match periods when the frontlines were reasonably static. This allows the player to focus on the air functionality without the messy and undignified distraction that is land combat.

DESIGNER'S NOTES

We really wanted to showcase the elegance of the air directive system and the benefits that it offers. In designing the air campaigns we were aware of the additional functionality that has been added to the game since release and included in this expansion. Some elements like air group insignia are pure chrome, pilot names add more immersion. The improved F10 – Air Navigation Panel and additional Air HQs make the organization and distribution of air groups much simpler and coherent. Look for the new ability to fly air superiority missions at night. In these scenarios, a portion of the pilots in each US Fighter Group are actual historical pilots with appropriate experience levels to reflect their actual success in combat. All “Aces” are in their appropriate Fighter Groups, and in some cases pilots with 2-4 air-to-air kills are included. Finally the two Air Campaigns should also be credited to Keith Butterley who provided the initial inspiration and much input and playtesting.

4.1. SCENARIO 7: POINTBLANK DIRECTIVE (16 JUNE 1943 – 5 APRIL 1944)

Designers: John Young and Randy Seger

Scenario Size: Medium (Air Campaign)

Turns: 42

4.1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Pointblank Directive was signed on 14 Jun 1943 and harmonized the activities of the US Eighth Air Force and RAF Bomber Command in a single Allied Combined Bomber Offensive. Up to that point they had been conducting separate approaches to the bombing of Germany. Arguably even afterwards Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris did things his own way.

4.1.2. PLAY TIPS

At the start of the scenario the Allied Air Forces are fragile. The 8th US Air Force is still building up. The methodology of the victory points system



means that as damage accumulates so does the number of points awarded per turn. As the Allies, don't try and win instantly. Take your time, look at which targets gain the most points and plan for the long haul. For the Axis you need to protect your key targets and inflict as many losses as possible. Every Allied aircraft destroyed will offset the Allies' score.

4.2. SCENARIO 8: WEAKEST LINK (14 SEPTEMBER 1944 – 1 FEBRUARY 1945)

Designers: John Young and Randy Seger

Scenario Size: Medium (Air Campaign)

Turns: 20

4.2.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The start of the scenario approximately coincides the removal of the control of the Strategic Air Forces from Eisenhower so that they might, as Portal wrote "...be used for the purpose for which they had been originally intended..." In this scenario the targets are principally Oil or Transportation. The Luftwaffe is collapsing and even some elements of Bomber Command can get away with flying during the day.



4.2.2. PLAY TIPS

You can refine your skills to help in a full campaign.

4.2.3. RECOMMENDED READING

Overy, Richard, *The Bombing War: Europe, 1939-1945*, Penguin Jun 2014

5. THE CAMPAIGN SCENARIOS

5.1. SCENARIO 9: 1945 CAMPAIGN (16 DECEMBER 1944 – 3 AUGUST 1945)

Designers: John Young and Randy Seger

Scenario Size: Large

Turns: 33

5.1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although this scenario is titled Campaign 45 we applied a little leeway and it starts on 16 December 1944 with Germany poised to launch Wacht am Rhein. This scenario allows players to fight the final six months, or more,



of the War in Europe. Germany is collapsing but the Westwall and Gothic Lines are still largely intact.

5.1.2. PLAY TIPS

For the Allies the choices are broad on where to attack: both on the ground and in the air. The AI will launch an attack in the Ardennes. For an Axis human player the first choice is whether to attack or instead conserve forces for a purely defensive battle. Using the EF Box there is also the choice to keep forces and especially the SS Panzer Divisions in the West. However to do so is detrimental to EF Box resistance. The Luftwaffe is very fragile as pilots are in very short supply, so be careful in their use.

5.1.3. DESIGNER'S NOTES

This scenario is based upon the Bulge to the Rhine (BttR) short scenario and includes Italy, strategic bombing and if you want the EF Box. It was our first choice scenario for development for the expansion as the end of BttR

generated relief and frustration in equal measure. The chance to play out the battles beyond the Rhine and see whether you can beat the Soviets to Berlin was far too tempting.

5.1.4. RECOMMENDED READING

Atkinson, Rick, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945 (Liberation Trilogy)*, Picador USA; Reprint edition (13 May 2014)

5.2. SCENARIO 10: (HYPOTHETICAL) THE 4TH SUPREME COMMAND (3 JULY 1943 – 3 AUGUST 1945)

Designers: John Young and Randy Seger

Scenario Size: Large

Turns: 109

5.2.1. BACKGROUND

Overview. This scenario is a what if modification of the stock 1943-45 Campaign with significantly stronger Axis forces. The scenario setup has been amended to address some of the fundamental weaknesses in the Axis setup in order to allow a different game experience. The changes have been made in a reasonably plausible manner to keep a level of acceptable immersion although the idea of Nazi Zombies was briefly considered. The major areas of amendment are oil and fuel availability, aircraft and AFV production, pilot availability and a slightly stronger starting setup. An early design decision was to keep the scenario AI compatible which meant that the time and space of the stock 43 Campaign had to be used for Turn 1. Hard coding also effects the HHQ names so although the command construct has changed the names are unchanged. As for the title, it is nod to the time during WW1 when Hindenburg and Ludendorff were de facto military dictators. That period was known as the Third Supreme Command (Dritte Oberste Heeresleitung).

Basic Production. Unlocking the constraints of historical production has been achieved by increasing the size of the Wietze Oilfield located near Celle in Northern Germany. Giving the Germans their own central oil production centre with 40% additional production capacity has a huge impact on raw materials. By adding fuel production but decreasing

synthetic fuel in order to deliver 20% more fuel, vast amounts of resources become available. This is because synthetic fuel production consumes 2500 tons of resources for only 500 tons of fuel, whereas refining the same amount needs only 1000 tons of oil. The available resources can be used by Heavy Industry to generate supplies for the production of Armaments, Vehicles, AFVs and Aircraft, with the remainder left for unit supply. Even increasing Vehicle and Armaments production by 30% hardly dents the huge increase in resources freed up by reducing synthetic fuel production. In order to restrain changes, the number of factory points has been capped at a 20% increase.

Divergence from History. Other than the larger oilfield, history is followed until 9 Mar 43. FM Erwin Rommel is flying north from Tunisia to meet with Hitler to persuade him to evacuate the Axis forces in North Africa. The loss of yet another Army, as has recently occurred at Stalingrad, would be in his mind a disaster. Unfortunately, his aircraft develops engine trouble and he is forced to land in Northern Italy. With no alternative aircraft available, he is delayed and by the time he reaches East Prussia for his meeting with the Fuhrer, he is too late. Hitler has departed to Smolensk to visit Army Group Centre at the invitation of FM Guenther von Kluge. On 13 Mar 43, Hitler concludes his visit and boards his Condor aircraft to return to Germany. He never makes it. This time, the bomb disguised in a Cointreau bottle, placed on the aircraft by Gen Henning von Tresckow, explodes. In the subsequent confusion and uncertainty, Rommel, who had been waiting at the Wolfschanze, takes control of the ensuing chaos by capitalizing on his skill as a Leader, the loyalty of the Fuhrer Begleit (of which he was a former Commander) and his popularity. Rommel's quick actions allow the Wehrmacht to seize power. In a replay of WWI, the Generalstab declare the 'Vierte Oberste Heeresabteilung' (OHL) or Supreme Command. A rapid and effective reorganization of the high command relationships ensues.

New High Command. OHL (not in game) is commanded by FM Gerd von Rundstedt (de facto CinC) with General Heinz Guderian as his Chief of Staff and takes the strategic responsibilities of OKW. OKH takes sole responsibility for the Eastern Front and is commanded by FM Erich von Manstein. OKW takes responsibility for the West and is commanded by FM Erwin Rommel. OKL is commanded by FM Albert Kesselring.



Strategy to Game start. Commanding the Western Theatre from OKW, Rommel issues orders to evacuate Tunisia. He concentrates on getting his armoured troops out, abandoning heavy equipment when necessary for trained soldiers. 10th Panzer, 21st Panzer, 334th Infantry, 90th Light and 164th Light Divisions are evacuated. The Italians evacuate the Superga, La Spezia, Giovani Fascisti, Centauro and Trieste Divisions. The 999 Afrika Division provides the rearguard and is largely destroyed with the remnants surrendering. 90th & 164th Light Divisions upgrade to Panzer Grenadier Divisions. The 15th Panzer Division remains as a Panzer Division. Meanwhile, from his position at OHL Guderian begins to rebuild the Panzer forces. Using the trained manpower and equipment rescued from Tunisia, his staff decide that rebuilding the 22nd Panzer Division is possible along with those units lost at Stalingrad. In the East Manstein bides his time and prepares for the backhand blow - there will be no major summer offensive, although as he pets his dachshund Knirps he amuses himself as he thinks about the time and effort the Soviets are putting into the Kursk salient thanks to his deception plans.

AFV Changes. With full authority over AFV production Guderian has started to optimize AFV design and production. The Ferdinand/Elefant is cancelled, development of the King Tiger is stopped, as is the no longer beautiful Jagdtiger. Czech 38t production is focused on the Marder III, sIG33 Grille and Flakpz 38t. The plan is to develop all 38t production into the Hetzer family. Medium tanks will either be PzIV or Panthers, with the Pz IV chassis used widely as assault guns and for anti-aircraft designs. Nashorn production is to be stopped the moment that the Jagdpanther can be brought into service. Finally, despite its age the Stug III is to be continued either in the g model, or perhaps the H42, but no Sturmpanzer IV will be produced.

Aircraft Changes. A new rigorous approach is taken to aircraft production. The He 219 is rushed into production. Other than production for the Axis Allies, Bf 110 and Ju 87 production is halted. Ju 88 production is streamlined to focus on night fighters and bombers with the Ju 188 cancelled. Torpedo bomber variants of the 88 are to continue in the short to medium term. The Me 210 is stopped and the Me 410 only produced as a nightfighter. Fw190 and Bf 109 production is increased with the Hs 129 to provide ground support. The He 111 and Do 217 production is stopped. The He 177B is to provide the long range capability (with four engines powering four propellers). The development of the Me 163 and He 162 is cancelled with the expertise sent to help on the Do335, Ta152 and Me262.

5.2.2. PLAY TIPS

This scenario is significantly more challenging for the Allies. It is suggested that for a more balanced game the penalties for delaying an invasion, which can be set on the scenario set up screen, are reduced.

5.3. SCENARIO 11: 1943-45 CAMPAIGN (ADDITIONAL AIR HQS) (3 JULY 1943 – 3 AUGUST 1945)

Designers: Trey Marshall, John Young, and Randy Seger

Scenario Size: Large

Turns: 109



5.3.1. DESIGNER'S NOTES

This scenario is an expansion of the original 1943 Campaign with the simple addition of additional subordinate Air HQs for the Allies. In addition, in this scenario, a portion of the pilots in each US Fighter Group are actual historical pilots with appropriate experience levels to reflect their actual success in combat. All "Aces" are in their appropriate Fighter Groups, and in some cases pilots with 2-4 air-to-air kills are included. Overall, this has a nominal impact on average group experience.

5.3.2. PLAY TIPS

The AI code does not recognize the new Air HQs so this scenario is for the human Allied player. Although it may seem counterintuitive once you are past Turn 1 I have found that the extra Air HQs make it easier and quicker to manage the air campaign.

6. NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN HISTORY (8 NOVEMBER 1942 – 13 MAY 1943)

By Trey Marshall

6.1. STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

In late 1942, the epic conflict for control of the Mediterranean was still very much in question. The lifeline of the British Empire ran through the Mediterranean Sea's maritime shipping lanes and the Commonwealth's grasp was on the verge of slipping. Middle Eastern oil was largely at stake as the Axis desperately needed the huge oil reserves in order to sustain its war machine. The conquest of Egypt and the defeat of the British 8th Army was all that stood in its way towards gaining those reserves and shutting down a large part of Great Britain's overseas economical support. The battle at El Alamein in late October was a desperately needed Allied victory at the very gates of Cairo. Although decisively beaten at the battle of El Alamein, Rommel's legendary Panzer Armee Afrika was still a fighting force and with proper reinforcements and logistical support, it could rebuild itself to launch a new offensive in 1943.

The French Vichy forces spread across half of France, Africa and the Middle East showed signs of discontent. Many of the French were displeased with their relationship as minor partner to Germany while many harbored a long held distrust towards the English. This distrust was exacerbated by the English abandoning its French ally at Dunkirk in 1940 and then the attack by the British fleet on the French fleet at Oran which left over 1,200 French soldiers dead and three battleships sunk. A few French units openly joined the Allied cause to fight the Axis. A great example of this is General Philippe Leclerc's L Force which fought side by side with the British 8th Army in North Africa. A majority of the French Vichy armed forces seemed to be on the sidelines waiting anxiously for their leaders to make the first move. Securing the loyalty of the French Vichy forces was a strategic objective of both the Axis and Allied forces which could tip the balance.

Spain also stood as a wary wildcard even though General Franco, dictator of Spain, was pro-Axis and had received military support from

Germany in the Spanish Civil War. Hitler constantly pressured Franco to join the Axis cause as a belligerent and seize Gibraltar. The loss of Gibraltar would essentially close off Allied shipping and lay a critical blow to the Commonwealth war effort abroad. Spain also had a significant number of forces in Spanish Morocco. These forces, projecting out of Tangiers, could also easily disrupt, if not shut down, maritime traffic moving through the Straits of Gibraltar. With Franco apparently playing both sides for his own interests, the Allies were very concerned that the entry of Spain into the war as an Axis partner could easily tip the scales of the balance of power in the Mediterranean to the Axis side.

Malta stood as an English buttress in a sea of Axis control and ambition. It was located at the strategic crossroads in the Mediterranean Sea between Sicily, Tunisia and Libya and was a major fortress and lifeline to the Commonwealth forces in North Africa. This tiny island boasted numerous airfields and naval ports which provided air cover to Allied convoys as well as joint air and submarine raids on Axis shipping. The capture of Malta was paramount to Axis success in order to secure its own lines of communication. The Axis were preparing for an invasion of the island under the codename 'Operation Herkules'. It was a joint German-Italian airborne and amphibious assault planned to be executed in November. In preparation for this assault, Malta had been subjected to a sustained and punishing aerial bombardment.

All of the German-Italian forces were located in Libya and were in the process of rapidly withdrawing from Egypt following its defeat at El Alamein. Panzer Armee Afrika's combat strength was nearly completely shattered and could only muster roughly fifty operational tanks. Axis air power was still a significant threat to the Allies' ground and naval forces. The Italian Navy (Regia Marina) still suffered from a severe shortage of fuel which prevented the force from conducting large naval fleet movements while German U-boats were still a significant threat as the Battle of the Atlantic was entering its climatic end. Vichy French forces, with outdated equipment, a sizeable naval fleet and shaky leadership, stretched from French Morocco on the Atlantic Ocean through Algeria and Tunisia. Spain, who was neutral but pro-Axis, occupied Spanish Morocco which straddled the Atlantic and Mediterranean.

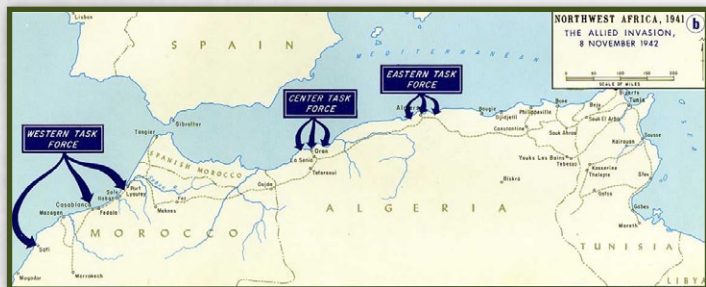
The critical weakness of the Axis forces in North Africa was its lack of logistical support. The ports in Libya were too small to support large

ground forces in sustained combat and the Commonwealth forces were inflicting significant damage to Axis shipping across the Mediterranean Sea. The two day convoy journey from Sicily to Benghazi and Tripoli were constantly subjected to Commonwealth submarine and aerial attacks. The lack of adequate logistical support was a significant factor in Rommel's defeat at El Alamein.

6.2. PLANNING FOR OPERATION TORCH

While both the United States and Great Britain agreed that the European theater should take priority over the Asian theater, there was disagreement about where the invasion should initially take place. The United States favored a direct assault from England into Fortress Europe, while Great Britain favored less risky assaults on the fringes of Axis control such as Norway. It was finally Churchill and Roosevelt who jointly made the decision to compromise. A joint Allied force would land at North Africa in 1942 followed by a European invasion in 1943 or 1944.

The choice of landing sites offered new strategic dilemmas for Allied planners and new disagreements between the partners. The British planners favored amphibious landings in Algeria which would allow for the quickest assault on the Axis ports in Tunisia. The Tunisian ports of Bizerte and Tunis offered the shortest shipping routes between Sicily and North Africa and would be the obvious choice for the Axis to build up its forces to repel an invasion. The Americans favored amphibious landings on the Atlantic coast of French Morocco due to concerns of the Spanish forces in Morocco. If the Spanish forces entered on the side of the Axis, they



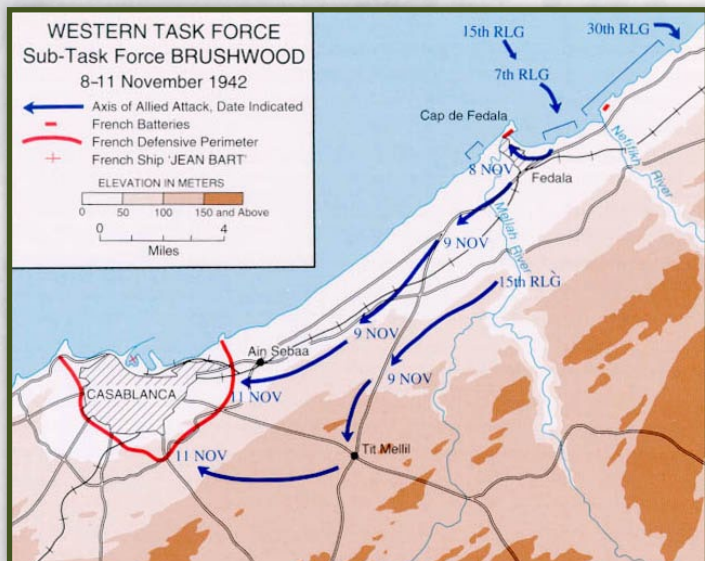
could easily shut down maritime traffic through the Straits of Gibraltar and strangle any invasion force through lack of supplies. By securing ports on the Atlantic coast, the Allies could retain lines of communication even if the Spanish intervened.

Additionally, there were concerns about a British command taking the leadership role of the joint Allied force due to French resentment over the British fleet sinking French ships and the killing of French soldiers near Oran in 1941. Vichy French forces would also never agree to cooperate with a British commander, so another great political compromise was struck when the American General Dwight D. Eisenhower was chosen to lead the invasion force. The invasion force was broken up into three commands. Major General George Patton would lead the Western Task Force landing near Casablanca while Major General Lloyd Fredendall would lead the Center Task Force landing at Oran. Finally, the British command, designated the Eastern Task Force, would be led by Lieutenant General Kenneth Anderson and would land at Algiers. The invasion date was set for 8 November 1942.

It was not certain exactly how the defending Vichy forces would respond. It was clear that many of the French were dissatisfied of being allied with the Germans but the French homeland was still threatened by German forces capable of invading southern France and terminating what independence was remaining. The French military commanders in North Africa would need varying levels of convincing to join the Allied side. Allied agents were dispatched to make contact with various political and military French leaders in North Africa to try to gain their support prior to the amphibious landings. Allied commanders planned to land on the beaches without pre-planned naval bombardments just in case the French were willing to negotiate.

6.3. WESTERN TASK FORCE

General Patton decided to land his amphibious force at three different sites to avoid a direct confrontation with the strong Vichy forces at Casablanca. The armored contingent under the 2nd Armored Division would land at the port of Safi, 140 miles south of Casablanca while a detachment of infantry under the 9th US Infantry Division would land at Port Lyautey to capture the airfields located nearby. Finally, the main infantry force would land at



Fedala, just north of Casablanca. The infantry and armored force would then link-up east of the city and then move west to clear the city with air support from the Naval Task Force's aircraft carrier and the newly liberated airfields with naval gunfire support off the coast.

The amphibious assault at Safi began without a preceding naval bombardment in hopes that the French forces would surrender and the objectives would be captured with a minimum of casualties. Once the US ships were sighted on the early morning of 8 November, French forces opened fire on the transport ships heading for shore. Heavy fighting continued throughout the day with the local French commander at Safi surrendering in the midafternoon.

At Port Lyautey, General Lucian Truscott conducted his amphibious assault to capture the airfields at the port by going through the town of Mehdia. Immediately the assault encountered problems with amphibious craft getting lost in the darkness and the heavy seas further delaying movement ashore with the result being a confused and disjointed landing. Vichy forces added to the confusion with a combination of small arms,

artillery fire from the coastal batteries and even strafing attacks by fighter planes. By nightfall, the Americans had not made much progress and French resistance was heavy and determined. The objectives were not captured until November 10th and required the extensive use of naval gunfire, artillery support and aerial coverage. The loss of the Vichy fort at Mehdia convinced the local commander to surrender in the early morning of 11 November.

The largest amphibious assault of the Western Task Force was conducted by the 3rd Infantry Division under General Jonathan Anderson at Fedala. Their objective was to neutralize the coastal batteries, seize the port of Fedala and then envelop Casablanca from the east. The port of Fedala also included a significant Vichy naval force including the uncompleted battleship *Jean Bart*. Even though the battleship was uncompleted, its 15" guns were operational. As at Port Lyautey, the amphibious force encountered problems maneuvering the seas in darkness as troops arrived dispersed and disoriented. At 0700, the Vichy fleet sortied out of the port and engaged the American naval task force with General Patton onboard. A tight naval engagement ensued over the following four hours until the French fleet broke off. By nightfall, a large number of US troops were ashore but well short of their objectives. The task force spent most of the day on November 9th clearing French positions and unloading heavy equipment and vehicles.

On the night of November 9th, Anderson's 3rd Infantry Division resumed its advance on Casablanca but was stalled through naval bombardments from the Vichy fleet offshore and the confusion of night movements and combat. On the morning of the 10th, Anderson's force had entered the outskirts of Casablanca with significant resistance. There was no response to Eisenhower's cease-fire proposal to the Vichy government and an urban assault on Casablanca was planned for the 11th.

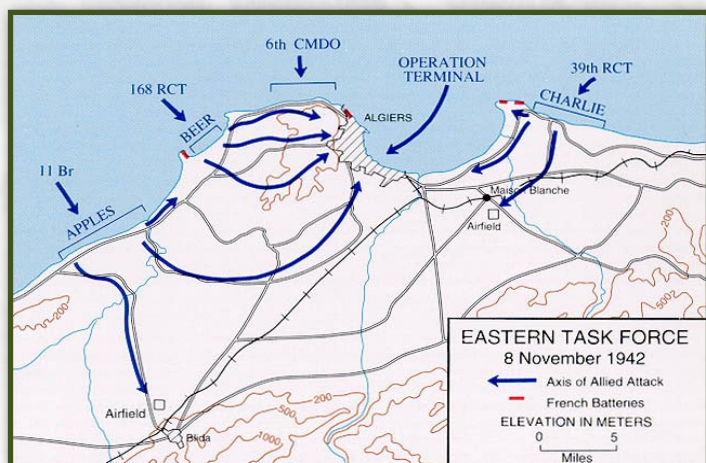
6.4. CENTER TASK FORCE

General Fredendall's Center Task Force was ordered to capture Oran with the 1st Infantry Division and Combat Command B of the 1st Armored Division. The landings were divided amongst three beaches designated Beaches X, Y and Z along a stretch of coast stretching fifty miles. The plan was for the forces to advance inland and capture the airfields and

6.5. EASTERN TASK FORCE

The Eastern Task Force, under command of British General Kenneth Anderson, was a joint operation that included naval and air support from the Royal Navy and Air Force and a combined American and British ground force. American General Charles Ryder would command parts of the 9th and 34th Infantry Divisions. The plan was similar to the plans of its sister task forces which was to land at three beaches, move inland to capture the airfields and then converge on Algiers. The British 11th Infantry Brigade of the 78th Infantry Division easily took Beach Apples and moved inland to capture the airfield at Blida. At Beer Beach, a number of problems delayed the American 168th Regimental Combat Team and the British 6th Commando from disembarking from its landing craft which significantly delayed its progress. At Charlie Beach, heavy Vichy coastal battery fire disrupted the landings of the American 39th Regimental Combat Team, but it still achieved its objective of capturing the airfield at Maison Blanche that morning.

The Eastern Task Force executed its own port denial mission by filling two Royal Navy destroyers with American soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment and sailing it under cover of darkness into the port of Algiers. It similarly came under heavy fire and almost managed to capture its objectives but with considerably less casualties than at Oran.



6.6. CEASE FIRE AND FRENCH COOPERATION

The Allied military operations of the Eastern Tank Force directly pressured the Vichy headquarters located at Algiers as it was the epicenter of Vichy military and political resistance. The Allied command was deeply engaged in sticky political negotiations by navigating around and through the Vichy commanders' conflicting interests, loyalties and egos. This intricate web of hidden factors played out on the battlefield in a very confusing manner as Allied soldiers never knew if they would encounter joyful French troops surrendering or fierce resistance.

General Eisenhower sent representatives to deliver negotiation terms to Marshal Petain at the outset of the Torch landings. Marshal Petain obviously had to refuse the cooperation requests due to the German occupation of France. However, Petain did allow his commander, Admiral Jean Darlan, to execute his military responsibilities with his own judgment. Admiral Darlan still distrusted the British from the attack on his fleet in 1941 and he allowed Vichy forces to resist for as long as he thought they were able. Then he approved the cease fire and cooperation with Allied forces at 2000 hours on 8 November and his forces around Algiers quickly surrendered. The French commanders at Oran and Casablanca ignored Darlan's order and negotiated their own cease fire agreements later as the contest of arms quickly turned against them. Having suffered casualties at the hands of the Vichy French and negotiating the tangled web of politics, Allied commanders would remain distrustful of their new French allies for some time.

The Allies had gained a new strategic partner in the Free French and their manpower was desperately needed to bolster the war effort. The political posturing still had to be entertained by the Allied High Command as various French generals clamored to be the ones in charge of the newly revitalized French force. This would be a constant headache for Eisenhower as he would have to delicately tip toe around these political maneuverings so as not to upset the French and at the same time find competent French commanders who could lead and fight. The main problem was that the hundreds of thousands of French soldiers in North Africa were poorly equipped but ready to fight. These troops were badly needed in the fight against Nazi Germany. The United States would take on the burden of equipping most of these troops from the basic uniform and rifle, all the way up to tanks and aircraft. In fact, the Americans would find it difficult to

sustain its own equipment losses in Tunisia due to these commitments to the French. In the long term, it was a brilliant decision as the Free French forces played crucial roles in Tunisia, Italy, the liberation of France and the final drive on Germany.

As a result of the French capitulation in North Africa, Hitler ordered the German military occupation of Southern France, disarmament of Vichy forces and approved the deployment of military forces to Tunisia to repel the Allied forces in Algeria. France was now under complete military occupation.

6.7. BRITISH 8TH ARMY PURSUES ROMMEL THROUGH CYRENAICA

Unknown to Allied or Axis commanders and possibly even to himself, Rommel's will to fight for the continuation of an Axis North African campaign was rapidly dwindling. Rommel admits to General Bayerlein, "The campaign has been lost, Bayerlein. If they don't see that in time in Berlin and Rome and take measures to save my soldiers, then one of the bravest armies will go into captivity. But who will then defend Italy against the invasion that threatens to follow." On the 10th of November, Rommel's shattered Panzer Armee Afrika had cleared passing the Halfaya Pass heading west back into Libya. Leaving a rearguard of elements of the 90th Light Afrika Division and the Italian 16th Pistoia Infantry Division, the remnants of the Panzer Armee Afrika was withdrawing just as fast as they could. All that General Bernard Montgomery could spare from his exhausted 8th Army for the pursuit of Rommel's withdrawing force was the



relatively fresh 2nd New Zealand Infantry Division and the 7th Armoured Division. The remainder of the 8th Army was simply exhausted, low on supplies and cleaning up the small pockets of resistance following its resounding victory at El Alamein.

At the gates of Halfaya Pass, also known as the 'Hellfire Pass', Rommel took stock of his situation. The Italian X Corps Headquarters had escaped in good order but the XX and XXI Italian Corps were completely lost, almost to the man. The divisions of the once mighty Afrika Korps had been reduced to the combat strength of reinforced regiments. Axis casualties at the Battle of El Alamein were around 35,000 men and the combat strength of the Panzer Armee Afrika was reduced to a couple dozen tanks, anti-tank guns and less than seventy five artillery pieces. The proud Italian divisions of the Littorio, Ariete, Folgore, Pavia, Brescia, Trento and Bologna had all been lost. Fuel was in desperate short supply and the RAF was constantly harassing the retreating columns. The Panzer Armee Afrika was in danger of being completely destroyed.

Montgomery had two immediate main objectives to accomplish to ensure that Rommel could not threaten Egypt again. The first was the capture of airfields along the Libyan coast to protect the Malta convoys and the other was to prevent Rommel from digging in at El Agheila. Commando Supremo was counting on Rommel establishing a bulwark at El Agheila in order to build strength for a future offensive and stop Montgomery's advance. Even with the Axis forces withdrawing as quickly as their fuel reserves were available, Montgomery was cautious. He was anxious that Rommel had another ace up his sleeve and was baiting the 8th Army into another trap in a replay of Operation Crusader in 1941. Montgomery was also not offensively reckless as Rommel was as Montgomery preferred to measure his advances to allow his logistical and air support to keep up with its support of the army. Logistical constraints ensured that only a fraction of the 8th Army could be employed against Rommel's forces.

Bardia fell to the 7th Armoured Division on the 12th and the rearguards of the 90th Light Afrika Division withdrew from the symbolic fortress at Tobruk and it fell on the following day. Montgomery's cautiousness was critiqued when he sent only a covering force of armored cars across the open desert toward Msus in an attempt to outflank Rommel's forces moving along the Libyan coast towards Benghazi. It was suggested that a larger force could have cut across the open desert and bagged the remainder of Rommel's

force. Montgomery cited the weather, logistical support, as well as his air support being out of range as reasons not to take the risk. The beating that the British took during Operation Crusader still lingered in the back of his mind. Was Rommel really finished? The airfields around Martuba were captured on 15 November and the convoy routes to Malta were much more secure. The Commonwealth had achieved a strategic as well as a significant emotional victory as Malta had been under constant air attack and the threat of invasion for months.

An attempt to cut off Rommel's forces at Benghazi was foiled by poor weather and the Panzer Armee Afrika once again slipped away. Benghazi fell on 20th as the rearguards of the 90th Light Afrika Division once again withdrew towards El Agheila and slipped past the converging nets of the 8th Army. By the 22nd, the Axis forces were consolidating around the natural and man-made defenses of El Agheila. The Panzer Armee Afrika was reinforced by fresh Italian units of the 80th La Spezia Assault Division, 136th Giovanni Fascists Infantry Division and the 131st Centauro Armored Division. Some tank and infantry replacements for the German units also arrived and the shattered army began to regain its fighting strength and its will to fight.

6.8. THE BATTLE OF EL AGHEILA

Rommel was given a direct order from Hitler, Kesselring and Mussolini to hold the defenses at El Agheila (Mersa Brega). The positions at El Agheila were solid with the Wadi Faregh essentially serving as an anti-tank ditch with several large salt marshes channeling movement into and around the area. The openings between the salt marshes were mined and backed up by concrete emplacements. Any assault on the positions would be a daunting task and the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) reported that Axis morale was improving. Although short on motorized vehicles and fuel, the Panzer Armee Afrika was in a position to resolutely defend in fixed positions.

Yet Rommel was not interested in defending Libya against the Allies and he persuaded the Italian High Command to allow him to start transporting Italian infantrymen west to Buerat several hundred miles up the coast road towards Tripoli on December 6th. The British troops hesitated before the defensive positions as the ghost of two past defeats at this very location haunted their thoughts. X British Corps needed the time anyway

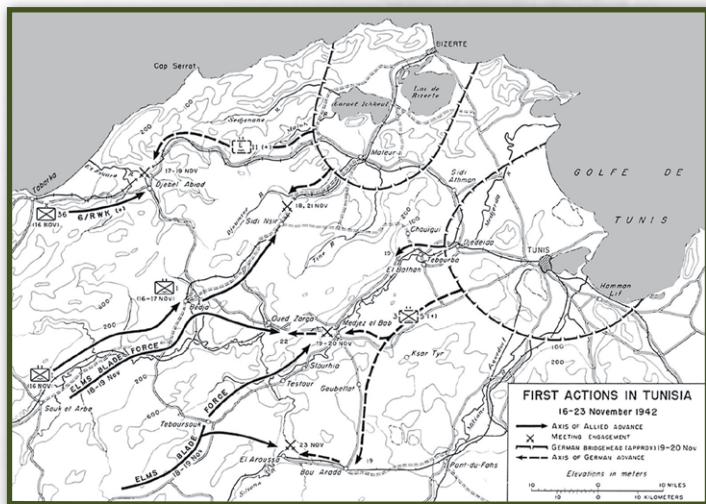
to get its sustainment situation in order as the units were at the end of an overextended supply chain. The corps was pulled out of the line and positioned further back along the coast road near Martuba to ensure there was not another one of Rommel's counterattacks. XXX Corps moved up to prepare for the assault.

On the night of 12 December, the 2nd New Zealand Division began moving south and west around the El Agheila positions in an attempt to block the line of retreat of Rommel's forces. The following night, Leese's XXX Corps launched the assault with the 51st Infantry Division and the 7th Armoured Division along the coast road. The 90th Light Afrika Division once again fought the rear action and kept the Allies at bay until the 15th when the Allies succeeded in capturing El Agheila. The 2nd New Zealand arrived at the coastal road near El Mugta in the rear of the Axis positions but the New Zealanders' movement had not gone unnoticed. That night, Rommel divided his forces in two groups and escaped past the New Zealanders. Although the battle resulted in very few casualties, Rommel's aura of invincibility was fading and the Commonwealth won another emotional victory.

6.9. THE RACE FOR TUNIS – MOVEMENT TO CONTACT

Upon the capitulation of the Vichy French forces in Algeria and Morocco, both the Allies and Axis forces rushed to Tunisia while assuming huge risks. British forces moved eastwards from Algeria while the terms of the French cooperation were not finalized and the Axis rushed into Tunisia unaware or uncaring what impact might be made upon the existing Vichy French garrisons remaining. Both sides had significant logistical issues to overcome. If the Allies could overtake Tunisia before it was reinforced, Rommel's lines of communication with mainland Europe would be severed and the Panzer Armee Afrika would be destroyed. Once Africa was cleared of Axis forces, the great prize of Sicily and the gateway to Europe was in its grasp. If the Axis could reinforce Tunisia quickly enough, it could exploit the American force's inexperience and force a decisive battle.

On the evening of 10 November, a British naval task force carrying the 36th Infantry Brigade of the 78th British Infantry Division left Algiers and moved quickly along the coast and landed at the Algerian port of Bougie. The port and the neighboring airfield were handed to the British without incident by enthusiastic local French troops. Early on the 12th, a small naval



group disembarked the British 6th Commando into the port of Bone on the eastern edge of Algeria near the Tunisian border. The Tunisian port of Bizerte was less than two hundred miles away. British paratroopers dropped and seized the airfield near Bone later that day. The port and the few airfields around Bone provided the Allies with some shipping capacity and forward airfields in which to protect its advancing columns and interdict Axis forces moving into Tunisia.

The 78th Infantry Division would spearhead the attack from Algeria and into Tunisia with two columns. The divisional combat elements would advance along the coastal road from Bone to port of Tabarka while the second British force consisting of the 1st Airborne Battalion would drop at the airfield at Souk el Arba. The third group would consist of the American 2nd Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment which would drop further to the south at the Youk-les-Bains airfield. These three combat groups covered the major avenues of approach along the Algerian-Tunisian border in order to facilitate rapid movement into Tunisia and delay reinforcing Axis troops. The two airborne drops were executed without problems and forward elements of the 78th Division advanced along the coastal road.

However, there was some risk as air support coverage of the advancing Allied columns was limited due to the long range from its airbases around Algiers and the primitive airfields lacked any kind of radar. To be successful, the Allied task force required aerial protection of the port of Bone and interdiction of Axis movements into the ports of Bizerte and Tunis. Congestion at the few Allied airfields in conjunction with problems in signal communications proved a significant challenge for Allied air commands.

Unfortunately for the Allies, the Axis was not going to hand over Tunisia without a fight. Upon hearing of the Allied landings during Operation Torch, Hitler ordered the Commander in Chief South, General Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, to send anything that could move into Tunisia immediately. The 5th Fallschirmjäger Regiment was the only immediately available German unit in the Mediterranean and it was air landed into Tunis and Bizerte on November 11th to provide local security for the ports. German U-boats were also ordered to attack Allied naval convoys off the coasts of Algeria and Morocco while Axis aircraft began arriving at the large airfield outside of Tunis at El Aounia. Kesselring understood what was at stake. General Nehring was given command of the newly formed XC Corps to control all German units in an around Tunisia. Nehring continued to extend the bridgeheads out of Bizerte and Tunis by building blocking positions in depth along the avenues of approach.

After the 5th Fallschirmjäger Regiment arrived, the reinforcements began to flood in. Replacement battalions marked to reinforce Rommel's command were flown directly into Tunisia as fighting battalions. Italian Marine Battalions and elements of the 1st Italian Superga Infantry Division were already disembarking by the middle of November at Bizerte. Kesselring's first order to Nehring was to advance westward towards Algeria to establish favorable defensive positions to block the expected Allied advance.

French troops in Tunisia found themselves in the unenviable position of facing demands from both Axis and Allies commanders while both forces converged in on an inevitable battle. French General Barre withdrew his troops into supply depots along the Algerian-Tunisian border around Medjez al Bab and deftly entertained negotiations without committing to either side.

The Germans struck the British 78th Division first near Djebel Abiod, east of Tabarka, with a joint Fallschirmjäger-Italian force on 17 November

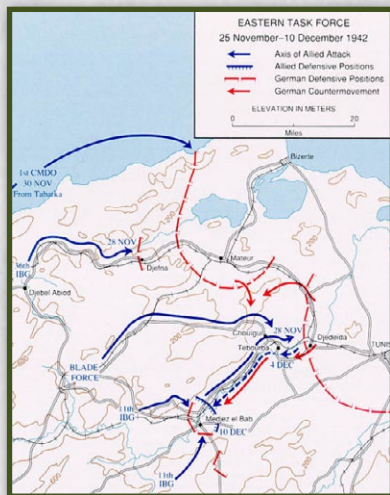
and a running clash continued for several days without either side gaining the upper hand. Another clash erupted near Bedja on 18 November. Blade Force, consisting of elements of the British 6th Armoured Division and US 1st Armored Division, began to move forward to support the General Barre's troops on the Algerian-Tunisian border.

Another column of German troops from the 5th Fallschirmjager Regiment approached some of General Barre's troops located around Medjez el Bab on 17 November. General Barre was given an ultimatum to withdraw from the area but Barre was stalling for time in order to allow the Allied forces to reinforce his position. Once it became clear to the Germans that General Barre was not going to cooperate, the 5th Fallschirmjager Regiment prepared to assault the town and capture the bridge over the Medjerda River. On the morning of 19 November, the Germans launched their assault backed by Stuka dive bombers while Allied reinforcements were not committed and the French were forced to withdraw. An advance from Medjez el Bab by the 5th Fallschirmjager was checked on 22 November by a joint force of Barre's troops and the 1st British Airborne Battalion. By 24 November, Axis forces had expanded the bridgehead as far as they could and waited for the inevitable Allied attack.

Italian and German troops started occupying the smaller Tunisian ports of Gabes, Sfax and Sousse by 21 November. A few days later, these forces began extending their operations westward towards Gafsa in order to prevent Allied forces from threatening its southern flank. On 20 November, a sizeable Italian force of the L Imperiale Brigade backed by tanks advanced on Gafsa. The Allied task force, built around the a battalion of the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment, beat back the attack and advanced towards Gabes and made it as far as El Guettar. For several days, Axis and Allied troops skirmished in and around Sbeitla but neither side had the strength yet to make any decisive gains on the southern flank. After almost two weeks, both sides had attempted pushes and were held. The Germans dug in and awaited the Allies next move.

6.10. THE RACE FOR TUNIS – ALLIED OFFENSIVE

General Anderson and his staff re-assessed the situation on 22 November. The ability of the Germans to execute such a rapid buildup was quite a shock and it was still unknown exactly what assets the Axis had in the area.



Anderson was going to need more units and even greater air support. Piecemeal units of various American units, including Combat Command B of the 1st Armored Division, began moving forward to support Anderson's 1st Army on the advance to Tunis. Allied forces consisted of the elements of the British 78th Infantry Division (36th and 11th Infantry Brigades) and the Blade Force (brigade sized unit comprised of armored units from the British 6th Armoured Division and American units from the 1st Armored Division).

German forces were organizing and preparing for the defense as additional units kept arriving. Nehring divided his northern forces into two defensive sectors focused around Bizerte and Tunis. He kept a reserve at Tunis to retain the ability to counterattack when the need arose. These defenses consisted of various strongpoints located in depth along the avenues of approach and small groups of roving patrols. By 25 November, Nehring's defensive force in Northern Tunisia consisted of the 5th Fallschirmjäger Regiment, Barethin Fallschirmjäger Regiment, elements of the 1st Italian Superga Infantry Division, several march infantry battalions and an assorted collection of support units. The Italian XXX Corps under General Vittorio Sogno was also beginning to unload. While Rommel was desperately withdrawing from almost certain encirclement by the British 8th Army, all German reserves in the Mediterranean were being rushed to Tunisia. Rommel would have to fend for himself.

The Eastern Task Force was now officially named the 1st British Army and the V British Corps would assume command of all Allied forces advancing on Tunis and Bizerte. General Eveleigh's 78th Infantry Division divided into three separate attack columns and advanced on Tunis on 23 November. The plan was for the division to secure Mateur, a vital

road junction on the way to Tunis. 36th Infantry Brigade moved along the northern route with Blade Force in the center and 11th Brigade on the southern flank. The XIX French Corps was activated under General Alphonse Juin and was ordered to secure the passes through the Tbessa Mountains and cover V Corps' right flank.

Blade Force's advance in the center moved towards Mateur and immediately engaged in small scale running skirmishes with Italian forces on 25 November. After a sharp engagement with a mix of German Fallschirmjager pioneers and Italians, American units of the 1st Armored Regiment rolled up undetected on the undefended Luftwaffe airfield at Djedeida. The American tank units proceeded to roll over the airfield and destroy over twenty German aircraft with minimal losses. This drew an aggressive response from Nehring as he dispatched his reserve to counterattack.

On 26 November, elements of the Fallschirmjager pioneers, a march battalion and the 190th Panzer Battalion advanced towards Tebourga but ran into the US 1st Armored Regiment cleverly deployed at the Chouigui Pass where the first American and German tank battle of World War Two unfolded. The Americans encountered the previously unknown long barreled 75mm Panzer IV tank and faced them with their light Stuart tanks armed with a 37mm cannon. With an efficient defensive plan and the help of English reinforcements, the Germans were driven from the battlefield.

The 11th Infantry Brigade, moving along the southern route, had its progress hampered by elements of the 5th Fallschirmjager Regiment backed by the 190th Panzer Battalion. After blooding the nose of the British, the German and Italians withdrew from Medjez el Bab on 26 November and a bailey bridge was erected over the river by the British. The next day, the brigade occupied the valuable crossroads at Tebourga while a strong German counterattack backed by tanks hit the brigade. The Germans withdrew at nightfall but had dealt a nasty blow to the 11th Infantry Brigade.

Nehring moved decisively to block the route through Tebourga by massing troops in adjacent areas to occupy key ridges near the Chouigui Pass. British units were sent towards the same dominating defensive positions on 28 November to prepare for a renewed attack on Djedeida. Additional Allied forces were being collected to prepare for this push with the Blade Force and Combat Command B of the 1st Armored Division prepared to join the attack. The efforts over the past week had been

frustratingly disappointing and this final push was to be the decisive effort to punch through to Mateur and on to Tunis. The attack would be assisted by an airborne drop by the 2nd British Paratroop Battalion and an amphibious landing by the 1st Commando while the 36th Infantry Brigade would continue its attack along the coastal road to Bizerte. Unbeknownst to the Allies, German new arrivals in theater now included the 501st Heavy Panzer Battalion armed with the new Tiger tank and the veteran 10th Panzer Division.

The Allied attacks all faltered in face of the German defenses on 28 November. The 36th Infantry Brigade ran into a costly ambush by the 11th Fallschirmjager Pioneer Battalion along the coastal road. A final night attack was attempted the next day by the 36th Brigade and the 6th Commando but was halted in the early morning by accurate machine gun fire. The 11th Infantry Brigade supported by the American 2-13th Armored Battalion ran into stiff German defenses at Djedeida while capturing the ridge overlooking the village. The village and its bridge were still in German hands. On the 29th, the 11th Infantry Brigade resumed its assault on the village with a heavy artillery barrage and screening smoke supported by American armor as heavy Luftwaffe close air support forced the Allies to suspend the attack. The Allied attack on Djedeida was halted on 30 November.

6.11. 10TH PANZER ATTACKS!

As the Allies were stopped cold on the advance towards Tunis, Kesselring prodded the defensive Nehring to attack to expand the bridgehead to recover better defensible terrain. The task was put to General Fischer's newly arrived 10th Panzer Division. Fischer organized his attack force into three initial groups: Group Koch (Fallschirmjager with Italian support), Group Lueder (tanks and motorcycle troops) and Group Hudel (tanks and dismounted infantry). The plan was for the force to attack north of Djedeida and hit the Allied armor massed there, and then attack Tebourga from the west.

The initial attack on 1 December by Group Lueder was successful as Blade Force and CCB fell back towards Tebourga to prevent being encircled. A secondary attack on Blade Force from the north by Group Hudel forced the Blade Force to disperse. German armor pursued the

withdrawing force southward. Both German groups were then stopped just north of Tebourga by effective artillery fire and delaying British armored cars. By sunset, the Allied situation was looking grim as Allied units were successfully outmaneuvered and Luftwaffe air support was deadly efficient. Blade Force essentially ceased to exist as an effective fighting force while the 11th Infantry Brigade was divided up into multiple defensive groups. Combat Command B was brought in during the night to shore up the defenses.

On 2 December, the Germans expanded their control from the gains they made in the previous day by attacking good defensive positions along the local ridgelines. Counterattacks by a combined armored force of the remnants of Blade Force and CCB were beaten back with heavy losses.

The following day, German Group Djedeida, reinforced by the newly arrived 86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, attacked the Allies on the high ground east of Tebourga. The other three German groups assisted the attack by attempting to prevent Allied forces from withdrawing by pinning them in place. The loss of Hill 186 proved decisive after a series of bitter attacks and counterattacks. That evening, the British prepared to abandon

Tebourga and withdraw under cover of darkness. During the confusing night retreat under heavy German artillery fire, many vehicles and heavy equipment had to be abandoned.

At noon on 4 December, the Germans captured Tebourga while Allied losses to the 10th Panzer Division's attack had been heavy. It was another serious setback dealt to the Allies while Axis forces continued to flow unabated into Tunisia.



6.12. SHORING UP THE SOUTHERN FLANK AND MORE ALLIED DISAPPOINTMENTS

The Allies were receiving reinforcements of their own in the form of the 1st Guards Infantry Brigade from the 78th Infantry Division and advanced elements of the British 6th Armoured Division. Blade Force was disbanded and its units returned to their parent organizations. The French XIX Corps, equipped with outdated equipment, was gaining strength and protecting the Allies southern flank. Eisenhower, not content to wait and regroup, wanted a renewed push in Tunisia.

With the additional French forces in central and southern Tunisia, the Axis southern flank was now threatened as the Allies began feeling their way southwards to exploit weaknesses in the Axis line. On 3 December, French forces occupied the Faid Pass near Sidi Bou Zid, the gateway to the Tunisian southern desert plains. On 8 December, French forces claimed Pichon as the French were quickly taking favorable defensive terrain in the south. If left unchecked, the French could outflank the Axis defenses and strike Tunis from the south or attack the ports of Sousse, Sfax and Gabes. This would effectively cut the lines of communications between Tunis and the Panzer Armee Afrika.

Nehring was also not content to stay idle as the veteran 10th Panzer Division was moved from Tebourga and towards Massicault to clear the Allies from the heights southwest of El Bathan. Once cleared, the 10th Panzer would advance with two prongs, one on either side of the Medjerda River, towards Medjez el Bab. The attack began on the early morning of 6 December.

A nasty engagement then took place on the heights of Djebel el Guessa with several waves of Stuka attacks on the defenders of CCB, 1st Armored Division. Fallschirmjager backed by panzers began sneaking through the natural defiles along the heights to close with the Americans. A battalion of the American 6th Armored Infantry Regiment was becoming unhinged. Reserves were committed to shore up the defenses with another battalion of armored infantry with tank support by the 2-13th Armored Battalion. The reinforcements engaged the German 10th Panzer but were too late in retaining the high ground. It was a bloody encounter for both sides and neither was interesting in continuing the fight the next day. The Allies did not reoccupy the heights and the German 10th Panzer Division broke off contact and did not resume its advance on Medjez el Bab.

On 7 December, the Allies began falling back to a new defensive line in order to consolidate its position after the bloody engagements with the 10th Panzer Division. The Allies new assessment was that breaking through to Tunis in its current situation was not possible. The new line was anchored just east of Medjez el Bab and extended south through Bou Arada and Le Kef.

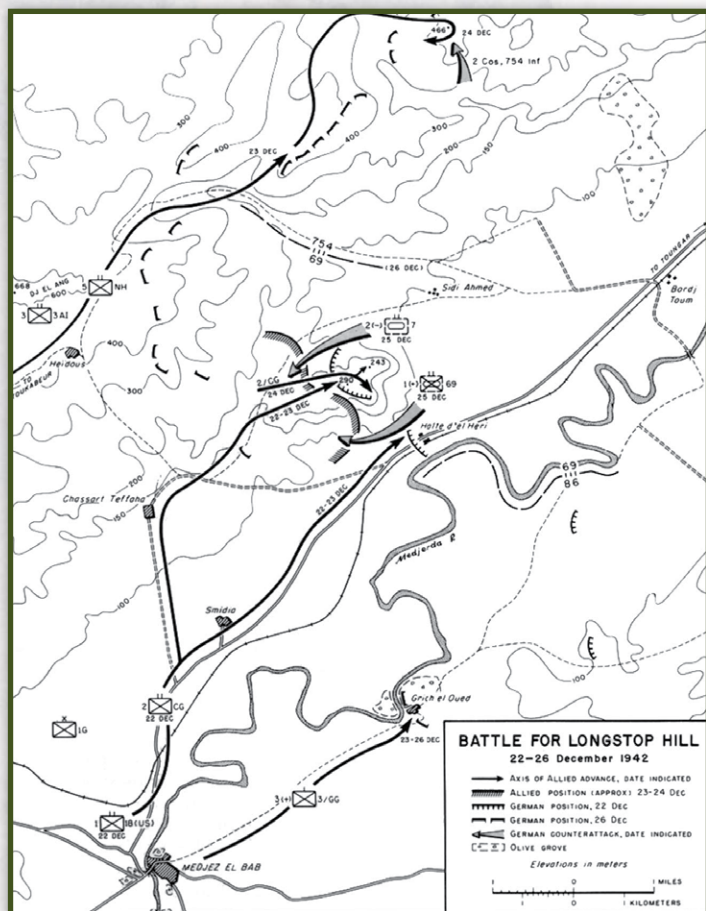
A local attack by the 86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, backed by Tiger tanks of the 501st Heavy Panzer Battalion, on 10 December struck along both sides of the Medjerda River. Combat Command B, supported by French forces, stopped the attack two miles east of Medjez el Bab in a torrential rain which made vehicular movement extremely difficult. Combat Command B was ordered to withdraw back behind its own lines under cover of darkness.

As the American units approached the river, traffic soon began to get very congested in the darkness and the ground became a sea of heavy muck. A small engagement with Germans broke out with occasional shelling and the Americans thought that an attack was imminent. The local American commander ordered all of the vehicles to reverse direction and move along an alternate route. The mud mired the entire column and the Americans were forced to abandon their vehicles and return on foot. It was a devastating blow to American morale and replacements could only be acquired by stripping other units in theater. Claims of the American losses were three dozen tanks and almost one hundred assorted guns and vehicles. For almost two weeks, Allied units rested and ran small patrols while they gathered strength.

Axis forces took advantage of the lull by consolidating their own defenses to include the weak southern flank. XC Corps was upgraded to the newly designated 5th Panzer Army with General Hans-Juergen von Arnim in command. XXX Italian Corps took command of southern Tunisia sector and grouped miscellaneous Italian combat battalions under General Giovanni Imperiali's L Speciale Brigade. The 1st Superga Division also joined XXX Corps. The newly arrived German 47th Grenadier Regiment protected the extreme southern flank of XXX Corps by occupying the mountain passes near Maknassy and El Guettar. Critical developments at Stalingrad on the Eastern Front were changing the amount of reserves Kesslring would have available in the near future.

6.13. THE BLOODY BATTLE OF LONGSTOP HILL

Eisenhower, deeply disappointed by the lack of progress and with Chief of Staff Marshall breathing down his neck, pushed General Anderson to get a new attack started and the night of 23 December was designated as the date of attack. Anderson planned to make a narrow attack towards



Tunis while concentrating his total force. The 78th Infantry Division (with the 18th Regimental Combat Team from the American 1st Infantry Division attached) and 6th Armoured Division would form the tip of the spear while CCB, 1st Armored Division would form the reserve. The French XIX Corps would launch a supporting attack to capture additional advantageous high ground along the dorsal mountains in central Tunisia. These French attacks were promptly stopped cold by the Italian 1st Superga Division.

Longstop Hill, located roughly seven miles northeast of Medjez el Bab, was one of the initial objectives of the Allies and offered a distinct tactical advantage to its owner. The 2nd Battalion of the Cold Stream Guards was ordered to take the hill. The hill was being held by the freshly arrived 754th Infantry Regiment of the 334th Infantry Division without heavy weapons. The initial attack by the Coldstream Guards on 22 December was made under the pouring rain and with a heavy artillery bombardment which resulted in some initial success. A German counterattack restored German control over a portion of the ridgeline while the British controlled the remainder. The American 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment was moving forward to take possession of the ridgeline from the British. Due to a confusing night movement, the handoff of the positions between the Americans and British did not happen and the Cold Stream Guards were ordered to withdraw with the Americans not properly established on the ridge.

On the morning of 23 December, the Americans realized that they did not control the entire ridge and made their attack. Another nasty engagement erupted as the Americans took heavy casualties during the assault and the German 69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment executed its own attack up the hill. Attack and counterattack by Americans and Germans persisted up and down the ridgeline throughout the day. The Cold Stream Guards were ordered back to the ridge to help the Americans and motor vehicle movement, due to the rain, became nearly impossible. German reinforcements from the 10th Panzer Division were ordered to support the fighting. On 25 December, the Germans dispersed a French unit and unhinged the Allied line. The Allied troops were ordered to withdraw from Longstop Hill. The Germans then proceeded to capture all of the remaining hill tops on the ridge. Losses amongst the two Allied battalions were catastrophic and the hill became known as "Christmas Hill". Total losses for the Allies numbered about five hundred men.

After failing to secure its initial objectives, Eisenhower and Anderson declared that the race to Tunis had failed and realized that a sustained effort would be required in order to eject the Axis out of North Africa.

6.14. INITIAL AIR CAMPAIGN OVER TUNISIA

Waves of Ju-52 transports from Sicily began unloading at El Aouina, the main airfield at Tunis, starting on 9 November and didn't stop until the Axis surrendered in May of 1943. The cargoes they disgorged were mainly soldiers armed with their personal weapons as the heavier equipment would have to be transported by sea. Vichy French soldiers operating the airfield and manning the anti-air guns watched on nervously as German Fallschirmjäger formed rank and file on the tarmac and moved into Tunis. Quickly following the transports were the Bf-109Gs of JG 53 'Ace of Spades' and Ju-87 Stukas of StG 3 from Italy. Thus began the aerial conflict over the skies of Tunisia and the Allies only had about a month of good weather in order to support the conflict.

The Luftwaffe struck the first blow of the campaign on 11 November when two British transports were sunk during the amphibious assault on the port of Bougie. The Allies desperately needed forward airfields to support the drive on Tunisia. Paratroopers from the British 3rd Paratrooper Battalion dropped on the Duzerville airfield just outside of the port of Bone and the Luftwaffe was again quick to hit the airfield with Ju-88s out of Sicily. Another airborne drop by the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry on Youks-les-Bains yielded another airfield near the Tunisian border. The Souk-el-Arba airfield was also captured in an airborne operation by the 1st Parachute Battalion. By the middle of November, the Allies had use of three airfields on the Tunisian border.

By mid-November, small groups of Allied strategic bombers were bombing the airfields at Tunis and Bizerte but the tactical aircraft of 12th Air Force were not ready to support the initial ground advance into Tunisia as ground crews were scattered, new air groups were still arriving and the logistics situation had not been sorted out yet. Luftwaffe bomber raids out of Sardinia were hammering Maison Blanche airfield, housing numerous American B-17s, outside of Algiers daily. Without radar or other detection methods, the Allies could not efficiently intercept these raids. With climbing aircraft losses on the ground, the Allies had no choice but to move the

heavier B-17s west to the airfield at Tafaraoui. The B-17s now had a longer flight to Tunis and the unimproved Tafaraoui airfield was a mass of sticky mud when the rains came. In fact, all of the Allied airfields were a complete mess when it rained. This had a major impact on operational readiness rates and congestion.

While the Axis airfields of Sidi Ahmed outside Bizerte and El Auoina outside of Tunis were primitive compared to the airfields of Europe, they were downright luxurious compared with the airfields that the Allies inherited in Algeria. The Germans had a marked advantage of having all-weather runways and dispersal areas while significant rain turned the Allied dirt airfields into morasses of mud. The Allied air forces had the same limitations as their ground based brethren in that availability of trucks was extremely limited and the logistical situation was a chaotic mess.

By late November, the Allied tactical air groups began making an impression. The American 1st Fighter Group's P-38s out of Youks-el-Bains in central Tunisia were soon making sorties along the Tunisian coast by taking down German and Italian transport planes landing at Sfax and Gabes. Bombing raids on the ports of Tunis and Bizerte were turning into bloody aerial engagements as German pilots were being introduced to the resiliency and firepower of the American B-17. Allied strategic bombers relentlessly bombed the Axis airfields throughout Tunisia. Close air support coordination with the ground forces driving on Tunisia and a lack of forward airfields were major barriers for the Allied success. Outdated German Stukas had no such problems and were blasting Allied troops as they were spotted. Stuka pilots were making three to four sorties a day while the Allied pilots could fly a single sortie per day in support. The American P-38 was the Allied fighter that had the best range but there were not enough of them to go around. The Luftwaffe was enjoying numerical superiority in the skies above Tunisia while the Allies could not concentrate enough air power to take on Axis bombers and even struggled to defend themselves.

In December, the 12th Air Force picked up the tempo of its operations with increased attacks on Axis airfields and fighter sweeps but the logistical situation was nearing complete collapse. Supplies were drained and spare parts and replacement aircraft were a rare sight. Aerial bombardments on the ports and airfields had their successful days but they were not without cost as the Germans were stuffing Tunis and Bizerte with flak guns. The

Axis air defenses were approaching the density of major European cities. In the middle of December, the winter rains began and a majority of the Allied airfields were mired in mud. Sorties out of the fields were nearly impossible as the Axis continued to build strength unhindered.

6.15. ALLIED LOGISTICAL CONSTRAINTS

The movement and sustainment of Allied forces from Algiers, Oran and Casablanca moving towards the Tunisian front were severely hampered. Rail lines in North Africa were few and the ones that did exist were made for light traffic. A scant number of rail cars were available and usage had to be divided between civilian traffic, resources for power generation, troop movements and sustainment packages. Trucks were in extremely short supply as combat units had to give up some of its organic transport to assist in the unloading of ports. Many of the American trucks that were designated to support the campaign did not arrive for months. The Allies had to resort to requisitioning every French vehicle they could lay their hands on. The trucks that were available focused on moving supplies off the ships and into storage areas. Heavy motorized traffic was also deteriorating the already primitive North African road network.

The ports along the North African coast, were miniscule compared to their European counterparts. This meant that only a few ships could unload every day which caused massive backlogs and it also meant that ships



were easier targets for air and submarine raids. The initial port unloading operations were plagued by lack of storage capacity, severe congestion and inefficiency. The Americans, in particular, were inexperienced in port operations and logistical planning and it took them months to sort out major inefficiencies. Additionally, the U-boat threat was still high and so all convoys had to be escorted by a large number of naval vessels and this further hampered turnaround times for convoys. The ports of Bone and Algiers were also under regular Luftwaffe raids.

Political Lend Lease commitments ensured that American equipment was sent to England, Soviet Union and the French first before its own forces could receive replacements. American units in North Africa were forced to use stockpiles of older Grants when Sherman tank losses became heavy. The 1st Armored Division also made up crew and equipment losses by stripping the 2nd Armored Division of its organic assets. In order to create the tactical air commands needed for commitment in North Africa, the USAAF was forced to strip units and replacement aircraft assigned to the 8th Air Force in England. This created severe shortages in both the 8th Air Force and the 12th Air Force. Shortages in replacement aircraft and repair parts were so severe that many air groups were made inactive for months. Sufficient numbers of aircraft and equipment to make up combat losses did not begin until the spring of 1943.

Supplies of all classes were also in short supply. Fuel consumption always exceeded planned rates. At ports and depots, the accumulated stockpiles were not properly unloaded or organized. There was initially not enough labor to get these stockpiles sorted out. Combat units had to fill in as labor and guard long lines of communications.

6.16. DEATH KNELL OF ITALIAN IMPERIAL AMBITION – TRIPOLI

Rommel continued his retreat along the Libyan coast road, hoping to set up a new defensive line at Buerat with the British 4th Light Armoured Brigade in close pursuit. The retreating Axis forces left booby traps all along the avenues of approach for the Commonwealth troops to trip over. New RAF bases had been established in eastern Tripolitania to keep the pressure on the Panzer Armee Afrika. The 8th Army finally closed on the Axis positions at Buerat on 29 December.

Montgomery was puzzled by Rommel's decision to hold at Buerat as the position was not as formidable as the El Agheila position nor the Tarhunah Mountains southeast of Tripoli. The great swath of mountains of the Tarhunah Mountains was a massive escarpment and could easily be defended by closing off of the passes that led to Tripoli. Montgomery remarked that this geographic feature was the best defensive terrain between Tunisia and Egypt and he expected a long and tough fight. Mussolini had ordered Rommel to defend the Buerat Line but Rommel convinced him otherwise and began withdrawing some of his forces to the Homs-Tarhunah Line on 4 January 1943 but he had no intention of staying even there. Now his forces were divided and Kesselring was furious.

The constant withdrawals of Axis forces was constantly stretching Montgomery's supply lines. As soon as he had built up enough supplies for an attack, Rommel's forces would slip away again without a decisive fight. Luck went against the 8th Army on 4 January when a massive storm ripped through Benghazi wreaking devastation on the port facilities and ships in the harbor. Supplies through the 8th Army's main port fell to a trickle. Nevertheless, Montgomery ordered an advance with whatever units were on hand by taking a huge gamble. If 8th Army could capture Tripoli within two weeks, they could open the port and continue the pursuit. If they failed, the entire army would be immobile and vulnerable to counterattack. There were not enough supplies on hand for all of Montgomery's units so X Corps was put in reserve and Leese's XXX Corps would continue the pursuit alone with three divisions. XXX Corps, consisting of the 2nd New Zealand, 51st Infantry and 7th Armoured Divisions, was tasked with penetrating the Buerat Line, attacking the Tarhunah defenses and then capturing Tripoli. It would be backed by a significant amount of air power from the Desert Air Force.

The 2nd New Zealand Division and the 7th Armoured Divisions attacked the Buerat Line on a two pronged attack on 15 January with heavy air support. The 2nd New Zealand attempted to outflank the position from the south while the 7th Armoured attacked the line directly while the 51st Infantry Division advanced along the coastal road. The defending 15th Panzer Division put up heavy resistance but sustained losses and found itself outmaneuvered by the end of the day. The 51st Infantry Division plodded forward along the heavily mined coastal road. Rommel began the retreat of his forces at Buerat towards the Tarhunah defenses. By early the next morning, XXX Corps had cleared the Buerat Line and Montgomery

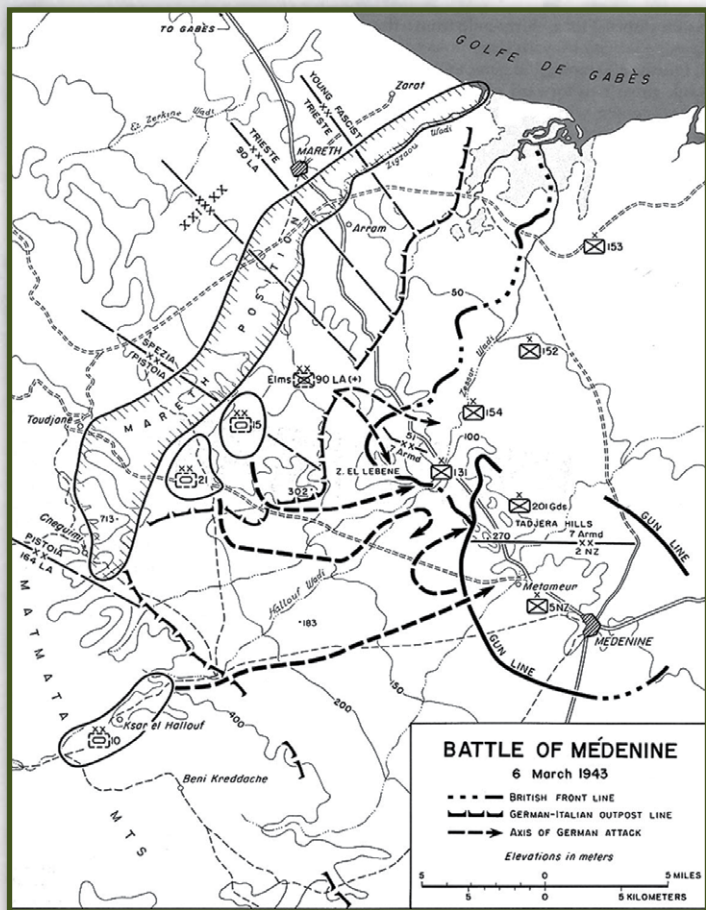
knew he had to beat Rommel to the Tarhunah Mountains or he would be stuck there for weeks and perhaps months. The Desert Air Force pounded the main Axis airbase at Tripoli at Castel Benito.

The 51st Infantry Division quickly took Misurata and Zliten with Montgomery breathing down General Wimberley's neck to press with speed along the coastal road. If he could penetrate the Tarhunah Line quickly, they had a shot at taking Tripoli and opening up a new source of supply. On 19 January, the 51st Infantry approached the defenses at Homs while the 7th Armoured Division attempted to force its way through one of the narrow passes through the Tarhunahs. Rommel transferred his reserves to defend the passes while leaving the 90th Light Afrika Division to defend Homs. Montgomery identified this shift and pressed hard on Wimberley's 51st Infantry Division to press the attack with the 22nd Armoured Brigade attached. Homs fell on the 20th and Rommel began evacuating the Tarhunah defenses with the 8th Army racing towards Tripoli. There was no time to erect any defenses in Tripoli and Rommel decided to give it up without a fight.

The 7th Armoured Division rolled through Tripoli in the early morning hours of 23 January. 8th Army veterans nearly wept with such an emotional victory. For over two years, Commonwealth forces had fought and died in the bitter sands of Libya and Egypt as they suffered numerous defeats and setbacks at the hands of an almost unbeatable Afrika Korps led by the legendary Erwin Rommel. There was little time to celebrate as the Panzer Armee Afrika was occupying the fixed emplacements of the Mareth Line in southern Tunisia. 5th Panzer Army and the Panzer Armee Afrika were now made whole in Tunisia.

6.17. THE DEFENSES AT MARETH

The 7th Armoured Division pursued Rommel's forces as it left Libya and crossed the Libyan-Tunisian border on 4 February. Although 8th Army had acquired a new supply port in Tripoli, the retreating Axis forces had wreaked significant damage on the port before they gave it up so supplies only trickled in while the port was repaired. Montgomery's forces were also facing the same issue that Anderson's 1st Army faced in Tunisia with the rain turning the terrain into a quagmire. Under severe limitations, Montgomery pursued with whatever force he could sustain with his limited amount of supplies.



The next obstacle that the 8th Army had to deal with was the French fixed defenses called the Mareth Line which started between Gabès and Medenine and extended west about thirty miles into the Matmata Hills. The salt marshes of the Chott el Feja and Chott el Jerid, combined with a huge expanse of the open desert, effectively prevented an attacker from

outflanking the position. Mountains and hills paralleled the coastal road as it veered northwards along the Gulf of Gabra. The Mareth Line did not extend all the way to the salt marshes as there was a small bottleneck called the Tebaga Gap between the Matmata Hills and the Jebel Tebaga Mountains. These concrete emplacements had long been stripped of French weaponry but had been in the process of rebuilding for several months. Tackling the defenses was going to require that the 8th Army build up its logistical capacity and bring enough aircraft forward in order to assault the Mareth Line. Meanwhile, the 7th Armoured Division captured Ben Gardane on 16 February and Medenine was occupied the next day and then the 8th Army halted and waited.

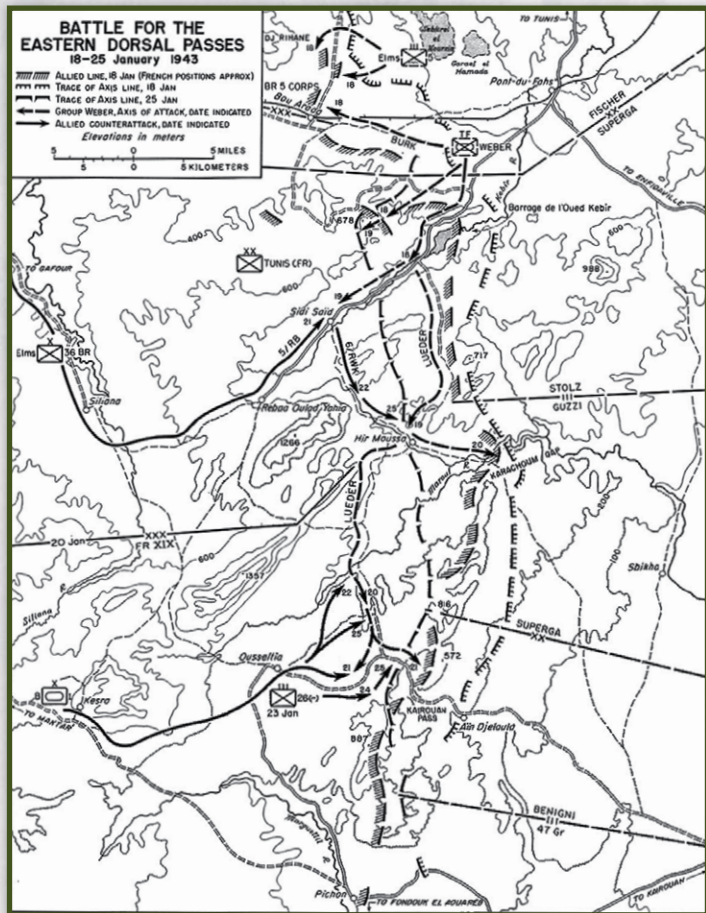
The 8th Army quickly went to work in building up a supply depot at Ben Gardane and the designated date of attack was set for mid-March. General Alexander, new appointed commander of 18th Army Group, directed Montgomery to apply pressure sooner. Rommel, now secure near his own supply bases, was getting restless and was looking for opportunities.

6.18. THE STRUGGLE FOR THE MOUNTAIN PASSES

From late December to mid-January 1943, Allied forces focused on improving their logistical situation and consolidating their gains. A few local attacks were made across the front in order to secure more favorable terrain usually in the form of ridgelines that offered better visibility and fields of fire. The French XIX Corps captured two dominant pieces of ground around the Karachoum Gap and the Kairouan Pass. This was followed by a successful Axis attack and the capture of the Fondouk el Aouareb, another important avenue of approach, by the 47th Grenadier Regiment and 190th Panzer Battalion. The French requested American support to throw the Germans back.

The American II Corps had arrived at Constantine in early January and had at its disposal the 1st Armored Division, the 26th Regimental Combat Team of the 1st Infantry Division, the French Constantine Division and the British 1st Parachute Brigade. The mission of the corps was to drive on Sfax and attempt to split the Axis forces in two. Its primary supply depot was positioned at Tbessa.

On 18 January, Axis forces attacked through the Tbessa Mountains in order to reclaim many of the important mountain passes in order to



prevent the Allies from breaking through the central Tunisian plain. The Axis attack was well supported by the 334th Infantry Division backed up by some 10th Panzer Division elements, 1st Italian Superga Division, the 501st Heavy Panzer Battalion and the 190th Panzer Battalion. A diversionary attack was executed by the 10th Panzer and 5th Fallschirmjäger Regiment

further to the north against the British V Corps while the 334th Infantry's attack would fall mainly on the XIX French Corps.

The diversionary attacks against the British V Corps did not accomplish anything significant. The 334th Infantry's attack was making progress in the Ousseltia Valley west of Kairouan. By the next day, French defenders were being pushed out everywhere. General Juin urgently requested Allied help and the American II Corps was ordered to intervene. Combat Command B arrived in the Ousseltia Valley on 20 January and was placed under French command.

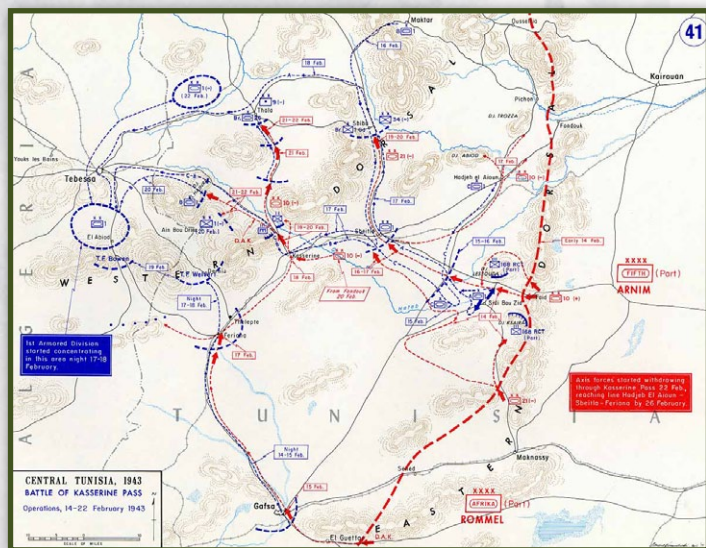
Even though the Axis had captured its objectives, they continued to press the French on 21 January. British forces from V Corps attacked along the right flank of the German advance which did not succeed in pushing the German forces out of Kairouan pass but it did allow some French units to escape. Another thrust by the American 2-13th Armor Battalion was also checked by the German 756th Mountain Regiment.

Combat Command B defended Ousseltia while the American 1st Infantry Division was brought forward. The German force had started to withdraw and it left elements of the Superga and L Imperiali in combat outposts along the western entry to the Kairouan pass when the elements of the 1st Infantry Division began its attack where it succeeded somewhat in gaining access to the western end. Due to this initial success, Combat Command B and the 26th Regimental Combat Team were withdrawn and positioned to shore up other defenses. Many of the American units were preparing in relieving the defensive positions of the French units while advance elements of the American 34th Infantry Division were also expected to arrive soon.

By 28 January, the Germans had inflicted significant losses on the underequipped French forces while retaking the various passes west of Kairouan. The Axis losses were likewise significant but was a price it was willing to pay to hold the Allies in the central Tunisian mountains.

6.19. ON THE ROAD TO KASSERINE

The new threat to the combined Axis force was from the American II Corps located near Tbesa in the central Tunisian mountains where it could potentially strike at Gafsa and drive to the coast. Such a move would split the Axis forces in two. The 21st Panzer Division was ordered to Sfax and placed under the command of the 5th Panzer Army to rebuild and prepare



for its own offensive. In the northern sector, the Germans were holding the British V Corps in place with Division 'Manteuffel', 10th Panzer Division and elements of the newly arrived Hermann Goering Division.

The Allies were not the only ones with logistical problems and the addition of the Panzer Armee Afrika in Tunisia did not help ease the Axis burden. Kesselring was concerned that the Axis could not handle additional convoys unloading in their docks. Although Axis convoys had the luxury of moving under the cover of night from Sicily to Tunisia, the sustained air attacks from the Allies was causing damage that significantly slowed the rate that shipping could be disembarked. Losses to merchantmen ships continued to climb as the Italian Navy was unable to provide an effective defense. Axis forces relied heavily on a large number of German Ju-52 transports organized in huge formations out of Sicily while they skimmed the wave tops towards Tunisia under light fighter escort.

With the Axis southern flank secure at the Mareth Line and the expectation that it would take weeks for the British 8th Army to be prepared for an attack, General von Arnim's Fifth Panzer Army began planning a

local counteroffensive to counter the American threat in central Tunisia. General Fredendall's II Corps was already moving elements of American forces further south to protect the passes which included elements of the 1st Armored Division. However, 1st Armored Division was broken up and deployed all over the French and American sectors.

Previous attacks by von Arnim's 21st Panzer Division at the Faid pass in late January had General Fredendall concerned. The Axis attacks from 30 January to 3 February forced the American II Corps to withdraw from Maknassy and back towards Gafsa. The loss of the Faid pass to the Germans was the hardest blow of all as it made the Americans vulnerable to future attacks.

Von Arnim started maneuvering Fifth Panzer Army forces again for a stronger attack as the majority of the 10th Panzer Division was shifted south near Kairouan. The 21st Panzer Division still lingered at the Faid pass. The Italian 131st Centauro Armored Division began moving towards Gafsa while the 15th Panzer Division began moving elements from the Mareth Line to join the Centauro. Both Rommel and von Arnim had their own plan for employing their forces to strike at the Americans. Von Arnim would be responsible for the strike from the Faid pass while Rommel's Panzer Armee Afrika would strike at Gafsa. Rommel was promised that the 21st Panzer Division would be returned to his command once von Arnim broke through the initial American defenses. Both commanders would have to coordinate with the other on a joint plan of attack but the understanding of the objectives was understood differently. Von Arnim planned on consolidating his gains and obtain more favorable defensive terrain while Rommel wanted to destroy the American II Corps.

Von Arnim's 21st and 10th Panzer Division, supported with Tiger tanks, struck Combat Command A of the 1st Armored Division at Sidi Bou Zid on 14 February. The converging German armored thrusts ejected the Americans out of Sid Bou Zid by the end of the day. Over forty American tanks has been lost as well as two battalions' worth of artillery. General Ward made preparations to counterattack with the 1st Armored Division the next day by requesting the spread out combat commands to return to the division. The British 1st Army refused to release Combat Command B while Combat Command C was ordered to move south and engage the German armor just west of Sidi Bou Zid. Gafsa was evacuated by the Americans that night as the kampfgруппes of the Afrika Korps were spotted moving on the town from the east.

On the morning of 15 February, Combat Command C advanced on Sidi Bou Zid from the west while under sustained German air attacks. While the American force was disrupted by the aerial attacks and artillery bombardments, the Germans prepared their own scheme of maneuver by attempting to envelop them from two sides. The American attack became disjointed by the afternoon as the Germans sent more units to counterattack from different sides. By early evening, the American units were beginning a hasty retreat while having to brave flanking anti-tank fire from all sides. Another forty American tanks had been lost while the Germans lost about twelve.

General Anderson and Eisenhower agreed that the Allies had overextended their defensive line and decided to collapse the southern flank towards the west to consolidate around Kasserine. This decision meant abandoning the air field at Thelepte and the loss of several vital passes. Eisenhower risked that the Axis supply situation would rapidly deteriorate and the British 8th Army's impending attack on the Mareth Line would force the Germans to quickly abandon the offensive. Over the next several days, American and French troops had to withdraw while under Axis pressure through the rough Tbesa Mountains. Heavy weapons were abandoned and many large groups were captured by Axis motorized troops while attempting to escape on foot.



Von Arnim refused to honor his commitment to transfer the 21st Panzer Division to Rommel and continued his own advance west from Sidi Bou Zid. Rommel pushed on to Feriana without his promised reinforcement. Rommel attempted to convince von Arnim of a combined thrust towards Tbesa and the American supply depot located there but von Arnim was more interested in holding a few more of the mountain passes than continuing the attack. While the two German commanders had their disagreement on the continuation of operations, the Americans got some breathing room to prepare their defenses. Arrival of additional Allied troops in theater and the shortening of lines allowed the Americans to start building up a reserve to include the newly released Combat Command B. The Combat Commands A and B deployed near Sbeitla, halfway between Sidi Bou Zid and Kasserine on 16 February.

Von Arnim's panzers began its new advance on 16 February towards Sbeitla and engaged the American 1st Armored Division in a night attack. Exhaustion and poor communications combined with inexperience in night fighting began to cause the American line to disintegrate. The attack quickly became a panicked route as American vehicles began pulling out and moving west without orders leaving sectors undefended. The Germans halted for the remainder of the night without pushing their unknown advantage. The Americans withdrew from Sbeitla in the early hours of 17 February and moved further west while leaving the Combat Command B as a covering force. Feriana also fell to the Afrika Korps on the same day. The new American line was established in the Kasserine pass and faced two German threats – Rommel's Afrika Korps advancing from the southeast and von Arnim's two panzer divisions advancing from the east.

Von Arnim's 10th Panzer Division, having captured the Fondoul el Aouareb pass, was ordered back to Kairouan as the 5th Panzer Army's reserve while the 21st Panzer Division held up at Sbeitla. Von Arnim had met his objectives but Rommel wasn't finished with his. Early on the morning of 18 February, Rommel pushed for his masterstroke, the decisive final push that would unhinge the Allied position in Tunisia. To accomplish this, he would need von Arnim's two panzer divisions re-assigned to his own Panzer Armee Afrika. Von Arnim was not interested so Rommel appealed directly to Kesselring to support his plan of driving towards Tbesa, the logistical center of the American forces, and on towards the Algerian port of Bone. Kesselring enthusiastically supported Rommel's exploitation plan.

then planned to commit the 10th Panzer Division thru the path of least resistance. The Italian Centauro Armored Division arrived from Gafsa to attack the Kasserine pass from a different direction.

That night, Commando Supremo ordered that Field Marshal Rommel be put in command of the newly designated Army Group Afrika. The Panzer Armee Afrika was renamed to the 1st Italian Army under the command of General Giovanni Messe. Rommel's new command also included von Arnim's 5th Panzer Army. The quarrelsome relationship between von Arnim and Rommel had instantly been cleared up. The Axis forces in Tunisia would now operate under Rommel's vision until the end.

The Allies were shifting to deal with this thrust. The French XIX Corps took responsibility of the Ksour gap near Sbiba backed by the British 6th Armoured Division, 1st Guards Brigade and elements of the newly arrived American 34th Infantry Division. Kasserine pass was still the responsibility of the American II Corps with the 1st Armored Division and elements of the 1st Infantry Division. Fredendall expected the Panzer Armee Afrika to strike the Kasserine pass early on the 19th and he wanted it held at all costs. In the late morning of the 19th, German artillery opened up on the American defenders while German infantry was seen climbing the slopes on both sides of the pass.

Panzer Grenadier Regiment Afrika spearheaded the assault on the pass backed by artillery and anti-aircraft units. Tanks of the 15th Panzer Division were sent in to follow up the infantry attack. Little known to the American command was that Rommel's thrust towards Kasserine was a diversion while the main attack was to come from the 21st Panzer Division striking north towards Sbiba. American reinforcements continued to arrive near Kasserine including elements of the 9th Infantry Division.

Meanwhile, the 21st Panzer Division advanced on Ksour from Sbeitla when it ran into several belts of mines. While slowly breaching these successive belts, Allied and German artillery duelled but the Allies had the advantage of being on the high ground with excellent fields of view. The combination of extensive mines and heavy British and American artillery fire was enough to force the 21st Panzer Division to break off the attack and withdraw.

By nightfall, the Germans had made some progress around Kasserine but the outcome was by no means decisive. German motorized and tank patrols kept close contact with the Americans and the infantry continued

to advance during the night in attempts to infiltrate around American defensive positions. The request to reinforce the Americans with the British 26th Armoured Brigade was denied by the 1st Army and instead prepared a small battlegroup. The infiltration of the German infantry on the night of 19-20 February succeeded in cutting off several American units resulting in much chaos and confusion. With the failure at Sbiba but the positive progress at Kasserine, Rommel decided to commit the 10th Panzer Division at Kasserine.

On the morning of the 20th, the Panzer Grenadier Regiment Afrika once again spearheaded the assault through the pass with heavy artillery and rocket launcher support. The 10th Panzer Division was held closely behind waiting for the breakthrough to be committed. The assault through the valley and along the ridgelines on both sides of the pass progressed slowly with Rommel committing more and more units into the fight as the day wore on. He had to break through the Americans quickly before American reserves stabilized the situation. By late afternoon, all of the Afrika Korps and the 10th Panzer Division was committed to the attack. The American defenses were crumbling but still throwing up a significant defense. The final push in the late afternoon finally broke the American defenses. The British tank battlegroup was destroyed to the last tank on the northern side of the pass. American infantry of the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment, 26th Infantry Regiment and 39th Infantry Regiment were overrun.

The 21st Panzer Division attempted another attack on the 20th through the Sbiba pass but was again heavily shelled and could not make any appreciable progress against the British and American defenders. With the successful defense of Sbiba, the Allies began shifting more units westward to block Rommel's advance from Kasserine. The 21st Panzer was ordered to conduct a defense while sending some of its mobile elements to reinforce the Afrika Korps at Kasserine.

With the pass cleared, Rommel now faced a road that split to the west and to the north. Allied reinforcements were coming down both roads to contain the Germans. Rommel was unsure of which way to attack because he didn't have enough forces to support both routes so he prepared for an Allied counterattack on the 21st and dispatched reconnaissance patrols in both directions. The Allies deployed and waited for Rommel to attack. The German patrol sent towards Tbesa to the west encountered significant resistance but the patrol moving northwards towards Thala successfully

GARY GRIGSBY'S WAR IN THE WEST

engaged a British tank force. Rommel decided to resume the attack towards Thala at noon.

The Afrika Korps was dispatched west to secure the passes of Djebel el Hamra west towards Tbesa while the 10th Panzer Division moved north towards Thala. The push by the Afrika Korps was stopped short of the el Hamra pass by heavy American artillery and stiff resistance by the 1st Armored Division. During the evening and night, the Afrika Korps probed south along the pass in an attempt to outflank the American defenses. On the morning of the 22nd, the Afrika Korps attacked from the Bou Chebka pass, several miles away from the Americans expected the attack to come from, and outflanked the American defenses forcing a general withdrawal. Meanwhile, elements of the Centauro Armored Division and the 15th Panzer Division tried to force the el Hamra pass. Devastating American artillery support backed by heavy anti-tank fire ensured that the Germans never threatened the pass. The Afrika Korps began planning to withdraw back to Kasserine.



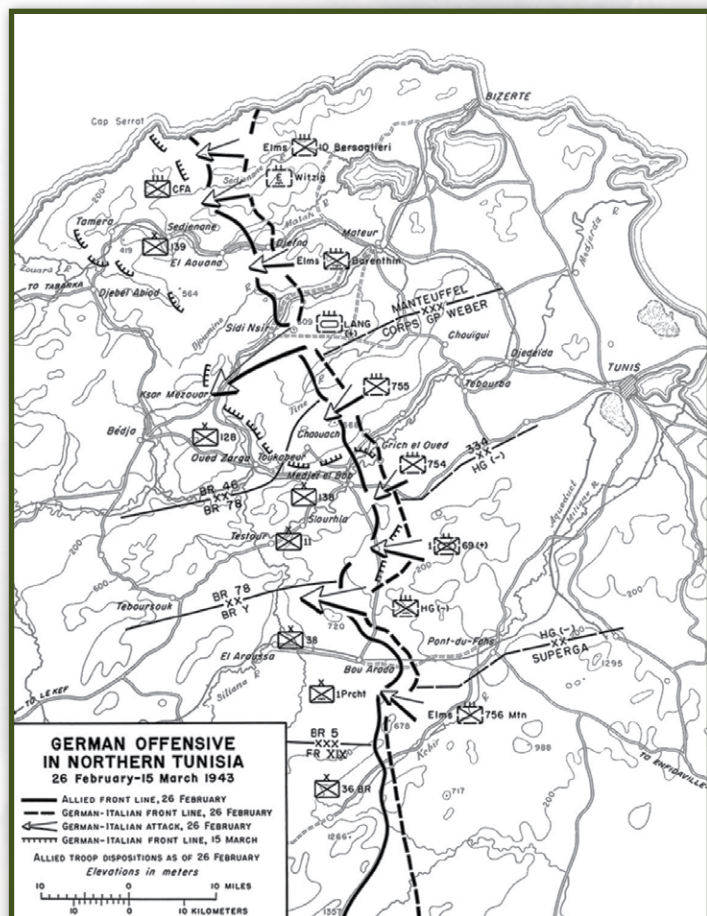
North at Thala, the 10th Panzer Division was bearing down on the British 26th Armoured Brigade. The German advance slowed as it engaged the British tanks and anticipated minefields. Rommel, concerned with the slow rate of advance, personally took command of the 10th Panzer Division spearhead and directed the advance. A renewed advance forced the British out of their defenses along the ridgeline and forced them back north to the last ridgeline south of Thala. That night, a wild melee erupted as both sides grappled in close combat with tanks and infantry. After a bitter three hour night fight, the Germans withdrew and the British narrowly held.

On the morning of the 23rd neither side advanced but airstrikes, artillery bombardments and small probing attacks persisted as both sides attempted to probe for an advantage. Additional Allied reinforcements during the day were solidifying the defenses and Rommel ordered his forces to switch over to the defensive. Rommel's force was now approaching dangerously low stocks of supplies to include fuel and ammunition. With Allied reinforcements building up at Tbesa and Thala, Rommel decided to retire back to the east. Although he did not achieve his masterstroke breakthrough, he dealt a decisive blow to the Allies' plan to cut the Axis forces in two through the central Tunisian plain.

General Alexander took command of the new 18th Army Group composed of the 1st and 8th British Armies in order to coordinate the final drive into Tunisia. American performance was highly criticized by their British and French counterparts. German losses from 14-22 February were estimated at around 1,000 men and 20 tanks while American losses were over 4,000 men and over two hundred tanks. The Germans also captured a large amount of equipment and supplies. The American 1st Armored Division was almost completely wrecked. Axis air power still dominated the theater while the Allies were still learning how to coordinate air and ground operations.

6.21. 5TH PANZER ARMY RETAINS THE INITIATIVE IN THE NORTH

On 24 February, General von Arnim proposed to Kesselring a new offensive all along the 5th Panzer Army's front with the objective of expanding its zone of control. With Allied reserves drawn towards Rommel's advance towards Thala, the Allies were assumed to be weakened in the northern sector of Tunisia. Rommel was aghast by the plan and considered it a tremendous



waste of resources. Kesselring, on the other hand, approved von Arnim's concept and sold the plan to the Commando Supremo.

The 334th Infantry Division, reinforced with a scratch panzer regiment, would form the spearhead of the Army's attack by advancing towards Bedja and through the embattled Medjez el Bab. General Manteuffel's Division,

composed of the Barenthin Fallschirmjager, 10th Bersaglieri Regiment and a Tunis March Regiment, would launch supporting attacks near Djebel Abiod. If successful, the 5th Panzer Army would gain valuable terrain that would put the Axis forces in a favorable position from which to launch future attacks.

Early morning on 26 February, Manteuffel's Division began its attack on the extreme northern flank in Tunisia. For several days, the Axis forces tried to out maneuver the tactical units of the British 46th Infantry Division and the Corps Franc d'Afrique (CFA) and achieved some initial success but then bogged down into a slow advance. The British reinforced the sector with the 1st Parachute Brigade but Manteuffel's Division continued to attack and slowly gained more ground. By 19 March, Manteuffel had secured his objective at Djebel Abiod and the front stabilized into another stalemate as Manteuffel's troops were exhausted. Three weeks of hard fighting had allowed the Axis to advance ten miles into the Allied defenses.

Supporting Manteuffel's attack on his southern flank, Colonel Lang's panzer kampfguppe began its attack down the same corridors that were so bitterly fought over during the previous November and December. The initial British positions of the 128th Infantry Brigade near Sidi Nsir were overrun when Colonel Lang's panzer kampfguppe rushed the Allied positions. Reinforcements from the 46th Infantry Division during the day were enough to stabilize the British positions the next day.

The next day, Lang's kampfguppe again moved west in the dense mountainous terrain when it was expertly ambushed by overwhelming fire from British anti-tank guns and artillery located on the ridgelines overlooking its advance. British bombers assisted in raining fire and destruction on the advancing column. Due to tight confines of the road with steep sides, the panzers did not have adequate space to reverse and escape. Many German vehicles were abandoned in a panic. It was a devastating setback to the Axis plan.

On 28 February, the 334th Infantry Division attacked at Toukabeur where it engaged the French 3rd Algerian Regiment while attempting to encircle Medjez el Bab from the north. The subsequent fighting over the next several days mauled the French units so bad that they had to be withdrawn. The 755th Grenadier Regiment got within several miles of Medjez el Bab and was then halted on 2 March as it was not willing to assault the significant British defenses on the west bank of the Medjerda River.

South of the 334th Infantry Division, elements of the Herman Goering Division and the 756th Mountain Regiment launched its attempt to encircle Medjez el Bab from the south. The British 11th Infantry Brigade from the 78th Infantry Division and the 1st Parachute Brigade defended the area around Slourhia. Again the Axis had success on the first day but the British held on the second day and then launched their own counterattacks to regain the lost ground. The inexperienced Herman Goering Division was thrown back with high losses.

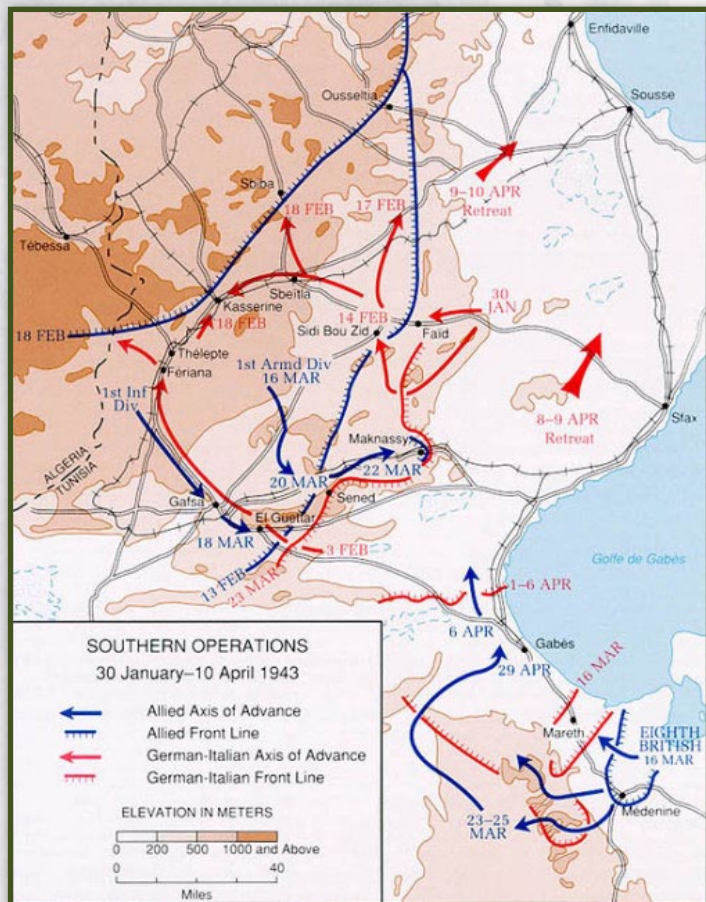
On 3 March, General von Arnim recognized that the offensive was doomed to failure as his losses in panzers were unsustainable. The ambush at Sidi Nsir had dropped his available panzer strength to single digits. Rommel was displeased by von Arnim's poor tactical choices in the employment of armor although the Germans still gained a few favorable pieces of defensible terrain and still threatened Medjez el Bab. Any future Allied attack would have to clear the Axis defenders from these locations.

6.22. MONTGOMERY CRACKS THE MARETH LINE

The next phase of the Allied campaign was to slowly constrict the Axis forces into tighter and tighter pockets. The British 1st Army focused on building more airstrips closer to the front and conducted light attacks along the front while the American II Corps, now under command of General George Patton, would execute tightly controlled attacks to regain the mountain passes and rebuild its confidence. General Montgomery's 8th Army would form the main effort to bust the Italian 1st Army's defenses along the Mareth Line and punch a hole to Gabes.

It took several weeks to get the bulk of the 8th Army across Libya and into position to attack southern Tunisia. Supplies were also slowly building up in the revitalized port of Tripoli. During this transitional period, the 8th Army was vulnerable and Montgomery was very nervous about an Axis counter offensive. Rommel's forces had pulled back from Kasserine and no one knew where he would strike next.

On 4 March, Axis forces were reported by aerial observers as being on the move near the Matmata Hills. The Axis diversionary attack would come from the Mareth Line and directly at the town of Medenine with the 90th Light Afrika Division and the Italian La Spezia and Trieste Infantry Divisions. The main attack swung from the west of Medenine with the Afrika Korp's 10th, 15th



and 21st Panzer Divisions supported by the 164th Light Afrika Division with less than a combined total of 150 panzers. Leese's XXX Corps was defending with the 2nd New Zealand, 51st Infantry and 7th Armoured Divisions.

The Axis descended upon the well prepared defenses of XXX Corps on 6 March which was well reinforced with mine belts and numerous dug-in

anti-tank guns. 300 tanks of the 7th Armoured Division sat in reserve but they weren't even needed. The Axis infantry assault from the Mareth Line was rebuffed with heavy losses. The Afrika Korps attack suffered a similar fate under heavy anti-tank gun and artillery fire. There were no weaknesses that could be easily exploited in the Commonwealth defenses and the Axis broke off at noon, regrouped and attacked again that afternoon with the same result. By the next morning, the Axis forces had withdrawn back behind the Mareth Line.

The battle was a decisive defensive victory for Montgomery and the 8th Army. Almost a fourth of the German tanks had been lost without the loss of a single Commonwealth tank. Montgomery's 8th Army was clearly the heavy hitter in Alexander's 18th Army Group and was expected to be the decisive element in the final struggle for Tunisia. Rommel, now visibly ill and exhausted, turned over command of Army Group Afrika to General von Arnim and returned to Europe. Rommel would not return to Africa but would oversee the defenses of northern Italy and France.

With the arrival of X Corps in the 8th Army's area of operations, Montgomery was ready with his plan of attack. His Long Range Desert Group had spent the last month surveying the avenues of approach in and around the Matmata Hills and the Mareth Line. A gap in the Matmata Hills southwest of Tataouine could allow the 8th Army to skirt the western flank of the Mareth Line. Since the Mareth Line extended less than thirty miles, there was another opportunity to probe around the defenses through the Tebaga Gap just southwest of Gabes between the Tebaga Mountains and the Matmata Hills. This was a risky plan as it would force his maneuver elements through almost two hundred miles of waterless desert and away from the lifeline of the coastal road. If the gaps were properly defended, those Commonwealth troops could be strung out without proper support for weeks.

The Mareth Line itself was tied into the large wadis of Wadi Zigzaou, Zessar and Zeuss. The slopes of these wadis were cut in such a way to make them formidable anti-tank ditches. Numerous concrete strongpoints reinforced positions along and between the wadis. These strongpoints consisted of a highly sophisticated network of trenches and crew served weapons pits with barbed wire and heavily mined with anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. These positions, originally built by the French prior to World War Two, were reinforced by German and Italian engineers.

Defending the fortifications was the 1st Italian Army commanded by General Giovanni Messe and he had at his disposal the Young Fascist, La Spezia, Trieste, Pistoia and the German 90th Light Afrika Infantry Divisions. The German 164th Light Afrika Division held the rugged hills to the west of the fortifications while elements of the Sahariano Group secured the deep desert around the Tebaga Gap. 15th Panzer Division was in reserve just behind the Mareth Line while the 21st Panzer was in reserve near Gabes. The 10th Panzer Division had been withdrawn even further north to watch the Americans.

On the night of March 16, 8th Army began its preliminary attack to clear minefields and probe for weaknesses. XXX Corps moved on the fortifications directly with the 50th and 51st Infantry Division while the 4th Indian Infantry Division moved into the Matmata Hills. The 201st Guards Infantry Brigade attacked the main defense at Horseshoe Hill where it struggled under heavy fire and was pinned down by heavy mines. Local counterattacks by the 90th Light Afrika Division inflicted heavy casualties on the British infantry. XXX Corps called off the attack without any success.

The 2nd New Zealand Infantry Division once again led the charge of the Commonwealth forces by leading the flanking movement along the western edge of the Matmata Hills on 19 March. It was heavily reinforced with Leclerc's Force 'L' and numerous support units and loaded down with enough supplies to make it self-sufficient for almost two weeks. The Allies hoped to keep the flanking movement a secret but it was quickly identified by the Axis forces. Montgomery ordered the 2nd New Zealand to rush the Tebaga Gap before the Italian 1st Army could dig in.

On 20 March, XXX Corps opened up a massive artillery barrage on the Mareth fortifications supported by the Desert Air Force. For the next forty-eight hours, the 50th Infantry Division forced a breach in the Wadi Zigzaou while the Royal Engineers worked tirelessly under fire to bridge the wadi to allow for the tanks to cross and exploit the penetration. The supporting infantry fanned out and began taking out Italian strongpoints.

On 21 March, the New Zealanders had reached the Tebaga Gap and routed some of the Sahariano Group. General Messe moved quickly to close the gap by ordering the 21st Panzer Division out of Gabes and the 164th Light Afrika Division in the Matmata Hills to attack and secure the Tebaga Gap while Freyberg's 2nd New Zealand Division hesitated. The German 164th Light Afrika Division now had enough forces in the gap to block Freyberg's progress through the gap.

Meanwhile at the Mareth Line, the penetration of the 50th Infantry Division was enjoying considerable success and the breach was rapidly being reinforced on 22 March. That afternoon, the German 15th Panzer Division, with elements of the 90th Light, launched the inevitable counterattack on the British point of penetration. The heavy rains assisted the Germans as Commonwealth air coverage was grounded. The only British tanks available to parry the German tanks were the 50th Royal Tank Regiment. After a long tank engagement, the German 15th Panzer Division crushed the available British tanks while German infantry proceeded to recapture all of the lost fortifications. The counterattack expelled the British 50th Infantry Division from the ground it had gained over the past several days. The 151st Infantry Brigade alone suffered over 500 casualties.

Montgomery became very anxious at the rough handling of his assault force and urgently requested to General Alexander to have the American II Corps attack the Italian 1st Army from the northwest. Although successful in preventing the Axis from withdrawing troops to the Mareth Line, Patton's II Corps did not gain any ground but the attacks did convince General von Arnim to start withdrawing the forces defending the Mareth Line towards the Gabes and Tebaga Gap. Kesselring visited von Arnim and Messe and informed them that withdrawal was out of the question and the Mareth Line and Tebaga Gap should be reinforced. The true threat was 8th Army, not the Americans.

Montgomery adjusted his strategy on 23 March by ordering the 1st Armoured Division to join the New Zealanders at the Tebaga Gap. The 4th Indian Division would continue to probe along the western edge of the Matmata Hills to secure a supply line to X Corps and outflank the Mareth Line. Montgomery wanted a penetrating assault as soon as the 1st Armoured Division arrived backed by the majority of the Desert Air Force. Alexander agreed to keep the Axis air busy by launching air sorties around Gabes. For three days the Desert Air Force prowled the Tebaga Gap by attacking anything that moved or looked like an enemy position.

On the afternoon of 26 March, the Desert Air Force launched one last massive aerial assault on enemy artillery positions and command and control nodes. The 2nd New Zealand, supported by the 8th Armoured Brigade, made their assault under the cover of a creeping artillery bombardment. Behind the New Zealanders was the 1st Armoured Division, ready to exploit any penetration and rush at Gabes. The German defense was

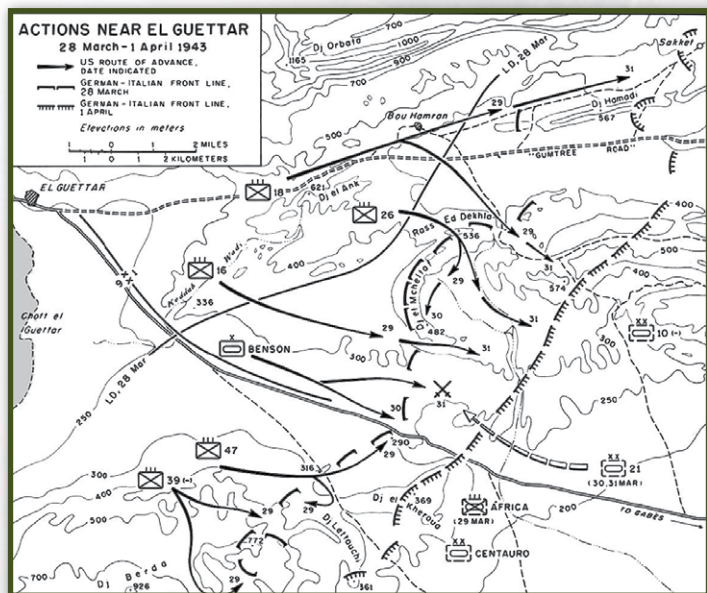
disorganized by the past days' worth of aerial and artillery bombardments punctuated with a few sharp engagements with the 21st Panzer Division. By early evening, the Commonwealth forces had broken through the main defenses with minimal losses. The advancing British tanks were ordered to speed up through the gap as the 21st Panzer Division desperately tried to withdraw to El Hamma and a counterattack by the 15th Panzer Division was easily thrown back. The formidable Mareth Line defenses had been outflanked and defeated in detail.

The Afrika Korps managed to delay X Corps long enough with an anti-tank screen at El Hamma to allow the Mareth Line defenders to escape the trap. Gabes fell on the 29th but the Italian 1st Army and the Afrika Korps were long gone. Casualties to the Germans and Italians had been heavy with massive losses of armored vehicles and heavy weapons. It was another major blow to Axis morale in Tunisia.

6.23. PATTON TAKES CHARGE OF II CORPS

General George Patton was given command of II Corps on 6 March 1943 when Lloyd Fredendall was relieved of his command following the poor showing of American forces during Rommel's counteroffensive in February. Patton's II Corps, under General Alexander's 18th Army Group, was given several objectives. II Corps was to maintain pressure in central Tunisia as a supporting attack in order to get as many Axis forces committed as possible. Any weakening of the Axis forces defending the Mareth Line and subsequent defensive lines would be of major assistance to General Montgomery's task of breaking through southern Tunisia with the 8th Army. Patton was to also capture and expand a number of airfields to the east in order to bring more Allied air power into the struggle for Tunisia. Finally, he was directed to build up a logistical center in which to support the decisive push into Tunisia. Facing Patton were the German and Italian troops of the Afrika Korps including the Centauro Armored and 10th Panzer Divisions.

Patton had several dilemmas. The first one was how to build up American morale and fighting spirit after the humiliating defeats around Kasserine. The other problem was Alexander's obvious lack of confidence in the American's capability by requiring Patton to get approvals on all movements. None of this sat well with Patton's aggressive spirit. Patton



was going to need some small successes in order to build the Americans up into a viable fighting force. The avenues of approach towards Gafsa and Maknassy were the key to a breakout from the mountainous terrain. The plan of attack was to begin in mid-March to correspond with the 8th Army's assault on the Mareth Line.

After a brief skirmish outside of Gafsa on 17 March, the 1st Infantry Division entered Gafsa unopposed as the Axis garrison had already withdrawn. The recon elements of the 1st Infantry moved east towards El Guettar while the 1st Armored Division's recon moved towards Maknassy. Heavy rains fell throughout the area flooding the wadis and making vehicular traffic along the roads nearly impossible. 1st Armored Division's attack on Station de Sened was delayed.

Once the rains cleared, the 1st Armored Division moved to outmaneuver the Axis forces at Station de Sened which was secured on 21 March. It was clear that Axis troops were simply delaying the American advance without making any defensive stands. The anticipated German armored counterattacks



never materialized while the Americans continued to advance on Maknassy. With the British 8th Army held up at the Mareth Line, Montgomery suggested to Alexander that the II Corps should launch stronger attacks to draw off Axis forces facing his units. Alexander issued the order to Patton on 22 March to prepare to break into the Axis's rear areas in order to help the 8th Army. Alexander was taking a risk as such a move would likely force the commitment of the 10th Panzer Division against

Patton's force. How Patton's II Corps would fare against a counterattack from the veteran 10th Panzer weighed heavily on Alexander's mind. If the Germans could strike a decisive blow against Patton, they could reinforce the Mareth defenses to make them nearly impregnable.

Patton wasted no time in ordering the 1st Armored Division to occupy the decisive high ground around Maknassy and launch raiding parties at the Axis airfields on the Tunisian plain once the Maknassy pass was cleared. It was also to prepare for an attack towards Mahares to cut off Axis lines of communication to the south. Kesselring immediately released the 10th Panzer Division from the operational reserve and directed it to counterattack the Americans.

The 1st Armored Division began its attack on the Maknassy pass during the night of 22 March. The attacks stalled on the 23rd while small advanced elements of the 10th Panzer Division arrived and took up positions on key heights overlooking the pass. The Germans, under excellent air coverage from Axis fighter bombers, were proving very difficult to dig out. It was obvious that the Germans were building up for a counterattack on the 1st Armored Division somewhere. Patton ordered renewed attacks on the pass which failed on 25 March forcing the division to switch over to

the defensive. The Maknassy pass was the last obstacle that needed to be secured in order to break through the plains and it remained firmly in German hands.

Meanwhile, the 1st Infantry Division held El Guettar and was continuing its advance eastwards parallel to 1st Armored's advance to the north. The Italian Centauro Armored Division was delaying the American advance without decisively defending any ground. On 23 March, the bulk of the 10th Panzer Division launched its counterattack along the Gabes-Gafsa road towards the American 1st Infantry Division.

On the morning of 23 March, the 1st Infantry Division was under heavy pressure from German tanks supported by mechanized infantry and included many instances of close combat fighting. The Germans made initial gains by overrunning many of the American infantry positions. The concentrated commitment of American tank destroyers and artillery forced the 10th Panzer back to reorganize. The Germans struck again in the late afternoon with the support of dive bombers while American fighter bombers prowled the battlefield and the 1st Infantry Division held their positions while inflicting heavy losses on a veteran German panzer division. Although the armored assault was contained, the Germans continued to put aggressive pressure on the Americans by probing their positions and recaptured several important defensive positions.

With the 8th Army pushing on El Hamma and the Tebaga Gap, II Corps was ordered to break out in order to force the Axis to withdraw from the Gabes positions. General Alexander reinforced II Corps with the 9th and 34th American Infantry Divisions. The advance through Maknassy was abandoned while the weight of II Corps focused on the El Guettar-Gabes road. On 28 March, the refocused attack began as the Axis forces were pulling out of the Mareth Line and were occupying the Wadi Akarit defenses along the Gabes gap. The Centauro and 10th Panzer Divisions continued to be the main Axis forces opposing II Corps and shifted their defensive weight anticipating the new American objectives.

The 9th Infantry Division spearheaded the new plan of attack on 28 March and was promptly frustrated in trying to capture the rocky heights overlooking the northern edge of the Gafsa-Gabes road. Meanwhile, the 1st Infantry Division efforts to clear the southern portion of the road were enjoying more success. The Germans were still in firm possession of the Gabes avenue of approach. 1st Armored Division held the Maknassy pass

with a small holding force while the remainder formed at Gafsa preparing for a German armored counterattack.

Alexander was getting impatient as the 8th Army was struggling to break the Italian 1st Army line at the Wadi Akarit. He ordered Patton to launch an immediate armored thrust towards Gabes on 29 March. With the Axis forces consolidated behind the much smaller defensive line at the Wadi Akarit, it could afford to dispatch additional forces to deal with the threat from Patton. On the 29th and 30th of March, the 21st Panzer Division and significant air support was sent north to repel the American armored advance along the Gafsa-Gabes road. The 10th Panzer Division left rear guards and joined the 21st Panzer's efforts.

1st Armored Division began advancing along the Gafsa-Gabes road at noon on 30 March and immediately faced deadly anti-tank fire and minefields that held up the advance for the rest of the day. During the night, American infantry succeeded in clearing the Axis forces on the southern heights along the road. The next day, Patton pressured the 1st Armored to push its way through with brute force. Trying to push through a constricted road with heights on either side was not the ideal scenario for an armored force and the Americans were easily halted.

Patton then ordered the holding force at Maknassy to attack in order to draw off some of the Axis defenders on the Gafsa-Gabes road. The holding force, being under constant probing pressure from the Germans over the past week, fared poorly on the attack. Patton was stuck and the British 8th Army would have to break the Gabes gap on its own.

6.24. THE LAST LINE IN SOUTHERN TUNISIA IS BROKEN

General Alexander pushed Patton and his II Corps to make the breakthrough to the Tunisian plain to force the Axis to withdraw from Gabes without forcing the 8th Army to assault the defenses in a bloody rush. General Anderson had also been working for several months to create a new reserve breakthrough force for the 1st Army with the employment of the British IX Corps. IX Corps was to be one of final blows launched towards Kairouan. With a combined thrust from the 8th Army driving from the south along the coast, with the American II Corps advancing from the west towards the coast, and IX Corps breaking through the central plain, the 1st Italian Army could be knocked out of the fight and a renewed drive

could be resumed on Tunis. Political pressure on Eisenhower was intense to wrap up the Tunisian operations so the invasion of Sicily could begin in order to lessen the pressure on the Soviets.

The battered Axis forces consolidated in a new east-west defensive line nicknamed the Gabes Gap along the Wadi Akarit. This position offered excellent defensible terrain as the Wadi Akarit served as a huge anti-tank ditch anchored by the impassible Chott el Djerid to the west and the Mediterranean Sea to the east and was about fifteen miles long. A good section of the Wadi was impassible to armor which allowed the Axis to focus anti-armor assets to the few crossing locations. It was the last natural barrier from the south that protected the southern Tunisian plain and the ports of Sfax and Sousse.

Von Arnim reported the desperate situation of Army Group Afrika to Kesselring. The Allied noose was tightening around the Axis forces. Months of Allied bombings of the Axis ports, airfields and depots was finally paying off. The Axis sustainment effort was collapsing as losses in transport aircraft and merchantmen could not be replaced. Stocks of all supplies were dangerously short and a lack of fuel severely limited any operational movement of units. Axis serviceable aircraft was down to less than three hundred in all of Tunisia while Allied air power was simply overpowering.

On 1 April, the British began round the clock artillery bombardments while Allied airpower pounded the defenses for several days without respite. Patton's II Corps, led by the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions, struggled to break out of the southern Tunisian mountains with poor air support. In the early morning darkness of 6 April, the Gurkhas of the Indian 4th Infantry Division kicked off the assault by XXX Corps with an infiltration attack under cover of darkness on the 800 foot Jebel Fatnassa. The Gurkhas cut right through the Italians of the La Spezia and Pistoia Divisions in close quarter combat and the ridge was taken.

The 50th and 51st British Infantry Divisions began their assault at daybreak on the 6th under a creeping barrage and the Italians surrendered in numbers although the 69th Infantry Brigade's attack quickly bogged down under heavy fire. After the initial successful attacks were reported, elements of the Afrika Korps were withdrawn from El Guettar facing the Americans and sent to counterattack the successful gains of the British XXX Corps in the Gabes gap to the south. Leese committed the 2nd New Zealand Division into the assault between the 50th and 51st Division while

the Desert Air Force kept the Axis aircraft busy with repeated attacks on German and Italian airfields.

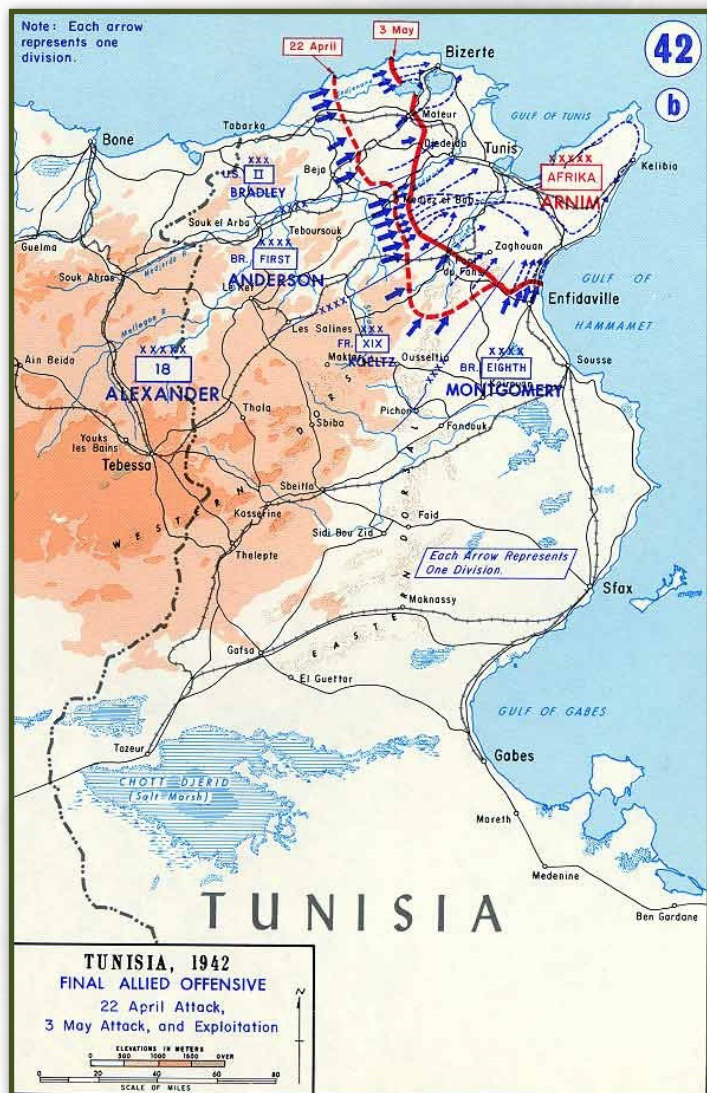
By noon, the attack by the 8th Army was progressing as planned with all immediate objectives accomplished with a nice hole punched through the Axis defenses along the Wadi Akarit. General Messe reported to von Arnim that the 1st Italian Army could maybe hold on another day. The counterattacks by the Afrika Korp's 15th Panzer and 90th Light Afrika Divisions were a failure under heavy British fighter bomber attacks. The Axis were left with a tough decision. They could attempt to stay and fight even though the Wadi Akarit had been breached in numerous places. If they did that, they had a slim chance of holding the Commonwealth forces but they would also give up an opportunity to withdraw with its force intact. The other option was to withdraw and give up the last favorable defensive terrain in southern Tunisia. Axis forces would be extremely vulnerable. Commando Supremo gave the order to withdraw on the night of the 6th and the depleted Axis divisions could barely muster the strength of regiments.

Montgomery would not give Messe time to consolidate and the chase was on. Axis forces in southern Tunisia were in full retreat.

6.25. THE TUNIS POCKET COLLAPSE

With the defeat of the Italian 1st Army at Wadi Akarit, General Alexander sent the order to IX Corps, with the British 6th Armoured Division and American 34th Infantry Division, to strike towards Kairouan and join in on the pursuit of the Italian 1st Army. The Allies were closing in on the kill to finish off Messe's command once and for all. By 9 April, the Fondouk pass had fallen to the 6th Armoured and 34th Infantry Divisions and the gateway to Kairouan was opened. As the 6th Armoured Division rolled towards Kairouan, the rear guard elements of the Afrika Korps were slipping away to the north. By the middle of April, central and southern Tunisia had been cleared of Axis forces and new airfields had been captured closer to the front. Axis forces were now narrowly confined to northeastern Tunisia. The important ports of Sfax and Sousse had been lost to the Allies.

Mussolini begged Hitler to establish a truce with the Soviet Union so that Tunisia could be held but Hitler was only interested in holding Tunisia and there would be no truce with the Soviets. There would also be no



withdrawal of Axis forces from Tunisia which contained some of the best fighting formations of the German and Italian Armies. The Allies had to be held in North Africa to prevent them from storming Europe. The Axis forces in the Tunisian pocket still held formidable defensive positions and were prepared to fight.

General Alexander decided to weigh the final attack with the 1st Army. The 1st Army did not have the same honors afforded to Montgomery's 8th Army as 1st Army was still a relatively inexperienced command. It had fought hard in Tunisia since it arrived in November and he thought it should be given the chance to spearhead the final assault and have its own battle honors as part of its history. Eisenhower demanded that the American II Corps be an integral part of the final assault knowing full well the British distaste for the poor American showing. Nevertheless, by thrusting II Corps into the thick of the fighting, the Americans had their own chance to rebuild their reputation and forge strong leadership under fire. II Corps was shifted to the extreme left flank of the 1st Army along the coast west of Bizerte. The command of II Corps passed to General Omar Bradley while Patton began planning for the invasion of Sicily. Montgomery's 8th Army would hold the far right flank along the coast of Tunisia.

The plan was simple. 8th Army would advance north along the eastern coast of Tunisia towards the Cape Bon peninsula in order to prevent Axis forces from withdrawing into the peninsula. 1st Army would attack straight towards Tunis while the II Corps would drive on Bizerte. 8th Army attacked first on the night of 19 April in order to coax Axis reinforcements away from Tunis to make 1st Army's advance a little easier.

On 22 April, the French XIX Corps would attack towards Zarhouan while the IX Corps launched its attack towards Pont-du-Fahs. V Corps was to recapture the bloody Longstop Hill and clear the German defenses around El Bathan and Massicault. The joint Allied Air Forces launched Operation Flax which intended to intercept Axis transports flying supplies from Sicily while heavy bombers pounded the Tunis and Bizerte airfields shortly afterwards. Allied air power would strangle the last logistical lifeline that the Axis had left. German losses of Ju-52 transports were staggering during the month of April.

8th Army's attack drove the Italians out of the positions near Enfidaville but prompt employment of German troops quickly contained the British. A few objectives were captured by the 8th Army on the first day but the

casualties were so high that Montgomery postponed the attack for several days which left 1st Army without its diversionary attack. A pre-emptive attack by the Herman Goering Division towards Medjez el Bab on 22 April succeeded in disrupting the attack plans of the IX and V Corps.

On 23 April, IX Corp's 46th Infantry Division succeeded in punching a hole in the Herman Goering's defensive line and the 6th Armoured Division was committed to exploit the gap towards Pont-du-Fahs. The entire southern flank of Army Group Afrika was threatened by the advance of IX Corps. The remnants of the Afrika Korps was ordered to withdraw from its current position facing the French XIX Corps and assume control over the Herman Goering's disintegrating line. 5th Panzer Army's only reserve, the 10th Panzer Division, was sent to help plug the gap. The subsequent week long battle between the British 6th Armoured Division and the 10th Panzer Division led to a standstill near Sebkret el Kourzia. Losses on both sides were heavy and Army Group Afrika found itself with less than one hundred operational tanks as it prepared for the next Allied hammer to fall. The last operational reserve of the Germans had been committed and Axis supply stocks of fuel and ammunition were reaching dangerous shortfalls.

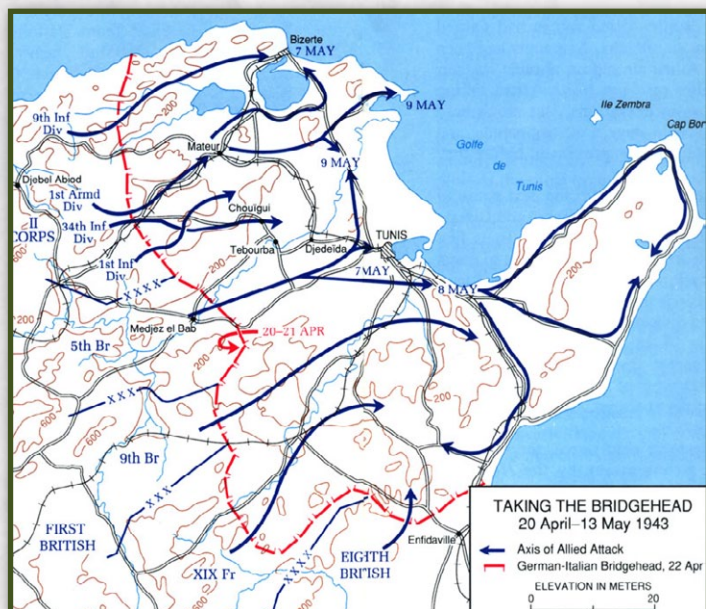
Meanwhile, Bradley's II Corps, including the Corps Franc d'Afrique, was to protect the British V Corp's left flank. The 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions would advance along the coast and threaten the axis positions in Mateur. The Americans knew that the Germans would be dug-in along the high ground overlooking the avenues of approach and decided to push with infantry at the German flanks on the hills. Once the hills were secure, the Germans would be forced to give up the heavily defended narrow avenues of approach. Engineers would clear the mines and the 1st Armored Division would be used to breakthrough towards Mateur. The Americans would also exploit their overwhelming artillery support during the advance. The Germans opposed the Americans with the Division von Manteuffel, a scratch unit composed of the 962nd Infantry Regiment, Barenthin Fallschirmjager Regiment and the 160th Tunis March Regiment.

For the next four days, the Americans and French fought their way across the rocky hills, up the defiles and through the valleys. German resistance was strong and launched counterattack after counterattack. Manteuffel's troops would withdraw at night and prepare for a new fight the next day. It was a tough slog day by day and opening up a route towards Mateur was still going to be a challenge. The American and French advance

towards Bizerte had gained about eight miles of ground while the advance towards Mateur was shut down after a few miles. II Corps renewed its attack towards Mateur with the arrival of the 34th Infantry Division which was bloody but successful. The Germans were forced to withdraw and Mateur fell on 3 May. Axis ammunition shortages were now so severe that supplies were moving directly from the port to the units in the field.

6.26. THE FINAL POCKETS ARE SECURED

On 30 April, General Alexander decided to stop posturing around the pocket for advantages and to break through the Axis defenses with brute force. With Montgomery unable to advance along the coast, he ordered the 8th Army to transfer the veteran 7th Armoured and 4th Indian Infantry Divisions to the 1st Army. The final thrust would have the 1st Army punch directly towards Tunis by way of Massicault with the II Corps keeping



Manteuffel's troops busy. Once Tunis was secure, the 1st Army and 8th Armies would drive into the Cape Bon Peninsula to prevent the Axis forces from making a final stand. Once the peninsula was secure, 1st Army would work with II Corps to capture Bizerte.

The Germans were fully aware of the 1st Army's intentions and had made ready all available reserves to resist the main effort. The last major Axis convoy arrived in Tunis on 4 May with badly needed ammunition and fuel and Axis troops were informed that there would be no evacuation. Axis airfields in Tunisia were cleared of aircraft as they departed and flew to new airfields on Sicily. German and Italian ground troops would have to fight to the bitter conclusion and there would be no relief.

On 6 May, tactical and strategic bombers pounded Axis positions while the IX Corps advanced under a creeping hailstorm of artillery bombardments in the early dawn. The 15th Panzer Division was overwhelmed by the firepower exhibited by the Allied forces and nearly overrun as Massicault was captured that afternoon. The 6th and 7th British Armoured Divisions were committed the next day and rolled into the suburbs of Tunis. The armored thrust was so quick that the Axis troops did not have an opportunity to wreck the port. The Axis forces were split in two. The 5th Panzer Army now occupied a pocket centered around Bizerte while the Italian 1st Army attempted to withdraw into the Cape Bon Peninsula.

II US Corps resumed its drive on Bizerte on 6 May while the Germans continued to put up strong resistance. The Corps Franc d'Afrique had the honor of officially liberating Bizerte on 8 May while Manteuffel withdrew. II Corps continued to push the German remnants into a number of smaller pockets and on the morning of 9 May, General Vaerst surrendered the 5th Panzer Army. General Messe and the Italian 1st Army held on until 13 May at which time he refused to surrender to the British 1st Army. Instead, he made arrangements to surrender to General Freyberg and the 8th Army, its persistent nemesis after two years of fighting over the desert sands of Libya, Egypt and finally, Tunisia.

French generals Barre and Juin were enthusiastically celebrated by the citizens of Bizerte and Tunis as liberators. General Alexander was anointed as the 1st Earl Alexander of Tunis. 275,000 German and Italian prisoners were collected and shipped around the world. Most of the German prisoners were shipped to prison camps across the United States. Many of the Germans decided to stay in the United States after the war rather

than return to a devastated Europe. Nevertheless, there was no rest for either the Allies or the Axis as the invasion of Sicily was only a few months away. American forces were bloodied and had learned from their earlier mistakes. Fresh German mechanized forces were already being deployed to Italy in preparation for the inevitable invasion which would prove to be another brutal slog for both sides.

7. ADDITIONAL MULTIPLAYER FUNCTIONALITY

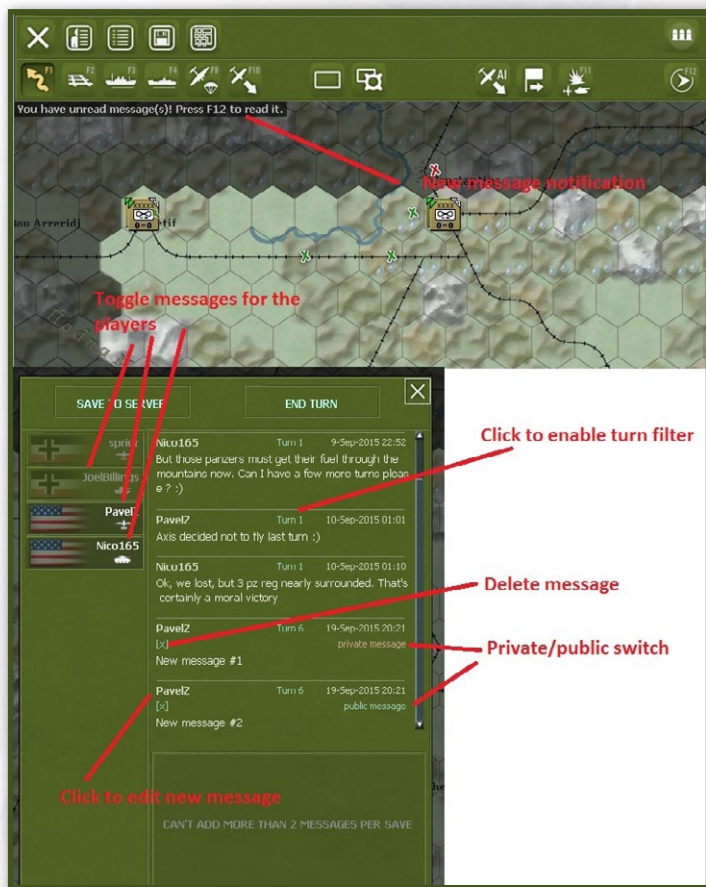
There have been many improvements in multiplayer support for *Operation Torch*. Older versions of *War in the West* will not be multiplayer-compatible with the version released along with *Operation Torch*. However, for scenarios not in *Operation Torch* and for standard 1vs1 multiplayer, as long as both players are on the same version all will work well. To gain the benefit of all the new features and content, it is required that both players have *Operation Torch* installed and be on the same game version.

There is a new messaging capability now built into Multiplayer. You can use this when setting up a Multiplayer game, to better describe the Challenge and also to communicate with your opponent each turn without needing an e-mail address or other contact information. Messages can be up to 255 characters in length and will be visible to all players in a Multiplayer game.

When setting up a challenge, note that you can click on the text box near the bottom right of the screen and enter a message of up to 255 characters. Press enter after completing the message, and the message will appear in the message section of the screen. This will show the most recent messages from all of the players.

When you start your turn, you may see a message that you have an unread message from your opponent. F12 will bring up the message interface. When you hit End Turn, you will also have a chance to read messages and add your own message, before the turn is completed and uploaded to the server.

Operation Torch owners now have the ability to split control of the air and ground portions of the game when setting up and playing multiplayer. This allows 3 and 4 player games, as well as the ability for 2 players to



team up in a cooperative game against the game's artificial intelligence. When command is split, the player assigned to be the air commander will be able to take actions during the air planning phase, and view the state of affairs after completing the air execution phase. This player will not be allowed to move ground units during the action phase (ground movement and combat). The ground commander will be able to take all legal actions



during the action phase, including moving air units and flying transport missions. It is important to note that the air commander must end the air planning phase, and once again press end phase after the completion of the air execution phase, to end his portion of the turn. After the second end phase, the game will be saved to the server and the ground commander will be notified via email that it is his turn.

The Server Game Options screen has changed slightly to allow players to set up cooperative vs AI and 3 and 4 player games. In the upper left, you can change the number of players and the resulting configuration of the game is reflected in the text at the top center of the screen. The two sides now show the ground and air commands in check boxes under the tank and aircraft symbols respectively. If the game is set to 2 player, there is a box that can be checked on just to the right of the text Cooperative vs AI. When this is checked, or when 3 or 4 players are selected, boxes will appear below the tank and aircraft symbols to allow for the desired selection commander and side. Notice that the Cooperative vs AI check box will be displayed under the opposite side of the side the player selects for himself.



Note that whenever a Cooperative vs AI, 3, or 4 player game is selected, the player will be forced to assign a password for the game in order to create the challenge.

Players may now view the current status of challenges not yet started and games that are in progress. Viewing a game will display the most recent messages logged by all the players. The Multiplayer screen graphically shows the number of human players in a game, and whether the AI is playing a side. Also, the split between air and ground commanders is shown with tank and aircraft icons.

8. CREDITS

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